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Photo by Marine Lt. Dominic William Pitrone

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A GIFT TO REMEMBER

Marine Sgt. Jesse James deployed three times to Iraq and Afghanistan, where he searched for and destroyed enemy explosives. He returned with traumatic brain injuries and PTSD, and the Homes for Wounded Warriors Program recently built James and his family a new house in Boone County, Ind. During his rehabilitation James learned to use a wood lathe, and he presented a handmade gavel to National Commander Jim Koutz during the commander's visit to his home department of Indiana. Photo by Eldon Lindsay



The American Legion Magazine, a leader among national general-interest publications, is published monthly by The American Legion for its 2.4 million members. These wartime veterans, working through 14,000 community-level posts, dedicate themselves to God and Country and traditional American values; strong national security; adequate and compassionate care for veterans, their widows and orphans; community service; and the wholesome development of our nation's youth.

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Cover,
The American
Legion Magazine,
June 1944

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'On the Brink'

Thank you for Alan W. Dowd's excellent article about the Cuban Missile Crisis (October). I was one of the school kids who "ducked and covered" in the 1950s, and I was 21 when President Kennedy gave his address on Oct. 22, 1962. Although I would go on to serve in Vietnam, that was the first time in my life that I felt I might actually be involved in a war. It was a sobering moment that I still vividly recall.

— Bruce W. Rider, Grapevine, Texas



Bettmann/Corbis

This article was interesting at a command level, but it left out many of the men who served as America's shield. On Oct. 12-13, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division was airlifted from Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, Calif., to Guantanamo, landing at 2 a.m. and then hiking into daylight heat as high as 114 degrees to set up a perimeter around the fence separating the base from Oriente province. We faced a large force of Cubans and Russians, and I recall a few nighttime combat patrols around the fence. Marine recon units were also operating there.

— William Bertoldi, Yucaipa, Calif.

I was radar on USS *Moale* during the crisis. In March 1962, we were deployed to Cuba to snoop on the Russians. Several of our radarmen were sent to a Navy intelligence school to learn how to operate electronics-intercept gear. A group of Army guys joined us on board, along with a large box anchored on the hangar deck. We patrolled for a month, gathering the footprints of electronic devices, including a Russian guidance system. We

spent a lot of time at general quarters when their patrol boat challenged us. They never got close, though, probably because they didn't like the twin 5-inch 38mm barrels looking at them.

We received the Navy Expeditionary Medal for this operation. I've tried to learn more about why, but I can't seem to get a straight answer. Naval records say that we were part of the blockade, but we were in the Mediterranean in October.

— Jim O'Donnell, Pueblo, Colo.

Fifty years ago, I was a 22-year-old missile tech aboard USS *George Washington*, the first submarine to carry Polaris missiles. We'd been underwater on routine patrol for 57 days, and were scheduled to return to our sub tender in Scotland when we were told of the Cuban crisis and advised to remain on station. We were far from Cuba but very close to the Soviet Union. Then the call came: "Man battle stations missile. This is not a drill." Our 16 missiles were readied. After what seemed like several hours, we got the word to secure battle stations – the crisis was over.

— Harry F. Gahm, Clementon, N.J.

I was a Marine radio-telegraph operator aboard USS *York County*. For several days prior to President Kennedy's address to the nation, we were copying messages indicating Russian ships with deck cargo thought to be missiles or other military hardware, apparently bound for Cuba. We were reportedly within days of our U.S. port when an encrypted message for the captain came over the net. Twenty-four hours later, we were anchored off the coast of Cuba with warships as far as you could see in every direction. We were given the option of writing letters home, then packed our sea bags and stored them in one of our "deuce and a halves" in the tank deck. It was scratchy, but we were able to hear Kennedy's "stand-down" message.

I've heard that the Russian commanders in Cuba had lost communication with their leadership and were prepared to answer any U.S. invasion with nuclear warheads. I guess we will never know.

— Tom Smock, Dunkerton, Iowa

This article failed to mention the Army's Nike missile defense system. More than 200 sites, with approximately 100 soldiers at each, were our last defense from Soviet attack. During the crisis, aircraft flying within our airspace were ready to shoot down the enemy. Few if any stories about the Nike missile systems, and the soldiers stationed at the batteries, can be found. From the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, thousands served.

— Chuck Zellers, Lincoln, Neb.

'Mission Possible'

I was so encouraged by Ken Olsen's article (October). This is exactly what needs to be offered to veterans leaving the military who are struggling to find civilian work. Their talents are being wasted and their morale destroyed. I agree with Jake Wood that "we're sitting on a gold mine of energy and enthusiasm and talent." It troubled me, though, to read that Team Rubicon is struggling financially. This wonderful program should be publicized more, and the next president should be made aware of this job creator.

— Harold L. Holloway Jr., Perkasie, Pa.

Holder contempt citation

Rep. Jason Chaffetz presented his argument for the contempt citation well, but Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's opposing argument fell short in every way (Big Issues, October). He didn't even address the issue, saying that Holder should not be held in contempt because "it has never been done before." Then he implied that the citation should be dropped because the minority caucuses walked out on the vote. Holder repeatedly ignored, and then only grudgingly provided, a minimum of the documents requested by the House Oversight Committee.

Doesn't Cleaver want to know what happened, and the circumstances of Agent Terry's death? Why are documents still being withheld? Why do Holder and the Department of Justice continue to be uncooperative? Where is the accountability?

— John S. Hendon, Fresno, Calif.

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver refers to the black caucus, the Hispanic caucus, the Asian Pacific caucus and the progressive caucus. No wonder members of Congress have trouble getting anything done; they're tied up in caucus meetings.

— Gerald P. Gladue, Smithville, N.J.

B-52 'just getting better'

The article by Roger Meyer on the B-52 (Rapid Fire, October) brought back a flood of memories for me as a tail gunner with the 328th Bomb Squadron at Castle Air Force Base, Calif., in the late 1950s. Thank you.

— Joe Vitas, Linthicum Heights, Md.

I was a crew chief on a B-52H at Minot Air Force Base, Md., from 1964 to 1967. The first time I saw it, I wondered how in the world they got that plane in the air. As I got on flight status and flew on it, the B-52 amazed me even more – how when you took off and the navigator read the footage off and said "commented," the plane just came up off the runway. Thank you for bringing back fond memories.

— Robert Thomas, Davenport, Fla.

Editor's note: The November cover featured Navy Seabee Jeff Brantley making a pencil rubbing of the name of Marvin G. Shields at the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall in Bartlett, Tenn., in June 2011. Shields was the first Seabee to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism during a 14-hour battle at Dong Xoai, Vietnam, on June 10, 1965. Photo by Mark Webst/The Commercial Appeal/ZUMA Press



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The need for a growing membership

I recently had the opportunity to testify before a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees. In doing so, I learned what national commanders before me have learned, which is that it's common for one or more senators or representatives to praise the commander – either during the hearing or afterward – for his input. Those members of Congress appreciate hearing the Legion's System Worth Saving (SWS) reports, our suggestions for improvements to the GI Bill, and more.

It just makes sense for Congress to listen to us and value our opinion. The Legion is the largest organization of wartime veterans, representing patriotic Americans from all backgrounds and eras. We're a group capable of speaking on behalf of many. With millions of members, The American Legion is a force in Washington.

The same is true at the state level. When a Legionnaire phones his local state representative and announces that he's a member of The American Legion, he's not just one veteran. He's one veteran capable of rallying the support of hundreds, even thousands, of Legionnaires.

Clearly, a strong and diverse membership is essential to our success as an organization. It gives us more boots on the ground to lobby local representatives and provide help for recovering warriors in our communities. Membership makes our voice louder on Capitol Hill, and it gives us more influence in congressional circles.

Simply put, membership is our lifeblood. The hard work of our dedicated volunteers and employees makes efforts like SWS a success, but our membership numbers are what demand the attention of Congress and the White House.

That's why The American Legion has set a goal to reach an all-time high of 3.3 million members by 2019 – our centennial. What better way to celebrate the Legion's 100th anniversary than with a voice that is louder than it has ever been? Potential members are out there; an estimated 16 million veterans are eligible for Legion membership, but only 2.4 million are members.

The benefits of reaching this goal are twofold. We not only ensure our continued success as an organization, but we also enhance our ability to protect the interests of all veterans, servicemembers and their families. A strong and diverse membership helps us serve as a better and more vocal advocate on their behalf.

We must reach our membership goal. The stakes are high not only for our organization to continue thriving, but for the nation's military community as a whole. Veterans and their families cannot afford to lose The American Legion as their advocate.

Imagine a world where Congress doesn't hear about access problems at VA hospitals, doesn't receive testimony about the need to allow military training to count for certification in civilian trades, and doesn't have American Legion expertise to call upon for help improving the GI Bill. Such a world would fail our founders' vision. Most of all, it would fail veterans and their families, who need us now more than ever, in record numbers.

James E. "Jim" Koutz



National Commander
James E. Koutz

MEMORANDA

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The American Legion has several Facebook pages for its various programs: Legion Riders, the national convention, Legion Baseball and others.

Go to the National Headquarters page to link up with the Legion's other Facebook pages.

 www.facebook.com/americanlegionhq

GUIDE TO HELP HOMELESS VETS

A new guide from The American Legion and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans – "On-Call: A Handbook for Homeless Veterans and Service Providers" – has information and resources for veterans dealing with homelessness and for service providers looking for answers. For copies of the booklet, contact the Economic Division at (202) 263-5771 or economicdivision@legion.org.

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GOP plan to stop sequestration



SUPPORT

Rep. Allen West, R-Fla.

■ West is a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

Catastrophic cuts are about to hit the U.S. military, jeopardizing the safety of all Americans. These automatic across-the-board cuts will substantially reduce funding for national defense and other essential domestic programs by as much as 10 percent, shrinking our military to a size not seen since World War II. During one of the most volatile and dangerous times in our country's history, this hit to defense is absolutely irresponsible and puts all Americans and their way of life at risk.

President Barack Obama's own defense secretary has referred to the pending sequestration as "not good policy" and says that "cuts of this magnitude done in an across-the-board fashion would be devastating to defense and nondefense programs."

House Republicans responsibly dealt with the looming threat, passing the Sequester Replacement Reconciliation Act of 2012. However, if the president opposes this bill and the Senate continues to not act, Republicans have said they are willing to work with him on alternatives. But we have yet to see even an inkling that he is working on a plan to protect America from the outcome of these cuts.

The National Security and Job Protection Act that I sponsored, which passed the House, requires the president to submit an alternative plan to replace the sequester and encourages the Senate to follow suit. House Republicans are willing to work across the aisle to create a solution that reduces lower-priority spending while protecting our troops, our national security, important domestic programs and our fragile economy.

The National Security and Job Protection Act shows the American people that their elected leaders are fully capable of working together to solve the problems facing our nation.



OPPOSE

Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md.

■ Van Hollen is ranking member of the House Budget Committee.

Every bipartisan group that has examined our deficit challenge has concluded that we should reduce the deficit through a mix of targeted cuts and additional revenue generated by closing tax breaks and loopholes that disproportionately

benefit the wealthy. Both the president and House Democrats have presented deficit-reduction plans that adopt such a balanced framework. Unfortunately, House Republicans reject this

balanced approach. In fact, 98 percent of them have signed a pledge promising not to ask millionaires to contribute one more dollar to reduce the deficit or to pay for national defense.

Last month I proposed to replace the first year of the sequester with a balanced plan that included cuts to certain agriculture and oil subsidies and the elimination of certain tax breaks for millionaires. House GOP leaders refused to even hold a vote on that plan. Instead, they voted on the so-called National Security and Job Protection Act, which, despite its misleading name, did nothing to actually prevent the sequester.

The same thing happened when we negotiated the Budget Control Act. Because Republicans refused to adopt a balanced deficit-reduction plan, Congress established the draconian sequestration mechanism that would automatically cut defense and nondefense spending beginning in 2013.

Our Republican colleagues talk a lot about protecting defense spending; they just don't want to pay for it. We can replace the sequester as soon as they agree to consider the bipartisan balanced approach. So long as they continue to place a higher priority on protecting special-interest tax breaks than on national security, it is hard to move forward. The keys are in their hands.

THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

House Republicans and Democrats remain at a stalemate on how to end the budget sequester provision that will trigger devastating cuts in defense spending.

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The Honorable (name), U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510 • Phone: (202) 224-3121

The Honorable (name), U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515 • Phone: (202) 225-3121



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Study explores possible link between household chemicals, heart problems

The chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), used to make products such as food packaging, polishes and lubricants, is detectable in the blood of more than 98 percent of people in the United States – and HealthDay reports that it may be associated with heart problems and peripheral artery disease.

In a 1,200-person study conducted by West Virginia University's School of Public Health, participants with higher PFOA levels were more likely to have these health issues. "This association appeared to be independent of other disease risk factors such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, smoking, body mass index, diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol levels," according to HealthDay.

However, Dr. Anoop Shankar, who helped coordinate the study, cautions that a conclusive link has not been proven. It is not clear whether the study participants developed the higher PFOA levels or the health problems first.

Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.

Don't suffer brain drain

BY MARK FUERST

No matter your age, it's important to lead a brain-healthy lifestyle to defer the onset of brain decline, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

"Keeping your brain healthy and monitoring your memory for early detection of issues will help to maintain independence as long as possible," says Dr. Wes Ashford, creator of a memory screening test called MemTrax. "People who have had a traumatic brain injury or developed post-traumatic stress disorder, as have some veterans, are more likely to develop memory problems and get Alzheimer's disease."

Ashford outlines 10 tips for keeping your brain healthy:

Exercise your mind. Take a class, learn a new language, or work puzzles such as crosswords and Sudoku.

Get physical. Adopt an exercise program incorporating aerobics, strength training and stretching.

Eat right. Limit red meat and dairy while consuming plenty of leafy greens, fish and nuts. Ashford also recommends vitamin E, vitamin C and a multivitamin supplement with folate and no iron.

Be social. Stay active with friends, get involved in the community and enjoy good conversation.

Watch your weight. Being in good shape physically helps you mentally.

Protect your noggin. Trauma to the head can be devastating to your memory. Protect your head by wearing a seat belt in the car and a helmet during any activity in which you could fall, such as skiing.

Love your heart. Maintain normal blood pressure – systolic pressure should be less than 130 mm of mercury and diastolic pressure less than 85mm. Watch your cholesterol and use statins if appropriate.

See your doctor. Physical health can affect cognitive health, so see your doctor regularly. If you have joint or muscle pains, ask about taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Keep your hormones stable, including your thyroid hormone levels.

Sleep tight. Try to limit your stress levels. Yoga or tai chi might help. If you have trouble falling asleep, consider taking melatonin at bedtime. If you snore, consult your doctor about sleep apnea.

Remember your memory.

Have your memory screened regularly after you turn 60, or use an at-home memory screening test such as MemTrax. Consult a clinician immediately if you find yourself having difficulty with your memory.

Mark Fuerst is a Brooklyn-based health and medical writer.



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Lighter leftovers

Turn your turkey into healthy dishes

The magazine *Eating Well* offers several healthy and tasty recipes for all those Thanksgiving leftovers in the fridge, from turkey tostadas and wild rice turkey to turkey pie and turkey wraps. Here's just a taste of the magazine's post-Turkey Day recipes.

Cream of Turkey & Wild Rice Soup

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
 2 cups sliced mushrooms (about 4 ounces)
 ¾ cup chopped celery
 ¾ cup chopped carrots
 ¼ cup chopped shallots
 ¼ cup all-purpose flour
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
 4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
 1 cup quick-cooking or instant wild rice
 3 cups shredded cooked turkey (12 ounces)
 ½ cup reduced-fat sour cream
 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Preparation

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add mushrooms, celery, carrots and shallots and cook, stirring, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add flour, salt and pepper and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes more.

Add broth and bring to a boil, scraping up any browned bits. Add rice and reduce heat to a simmer. Cover and cook until the rice is tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in turkey, sour cream and parsley and cook until heated through, about 2 minutes more.



Media Bakery



Media Bakery

Fifteen minutes

Even a small amount of exercise every day can have lasting health benefits.

BY MARK FUERST

Don't despair if you can't fit in the recommended 30 minutes of daily exercise. New evidence suggests that even half that time – just 15 minutes a day – can lengthen your life span.

Regular exercise strengthens muscles, reduces the risk of some diseases and promotes mental well-being. The more exercise, the better. But not everyone has the time or willpower. So researchers set out to find the minimum amount of physical activity needed to reap health benefits.

The findings, from a study published in *The Lancet*, suggest that just 15 minutes of moderate exercise a day – or 90 minutes a week – can cut the risk of death by 14 percent and extend life expectancy by three years compared to

Crispy Turkey Tostadas

1 14-ounce can petite diced tomatoes, preferably with jalapeños

1 medium onion, thinly sliced

3 cups shredded cooked turkey (12 ounces)

8 corn tortillas

Canola or olive oil cooking spray

1 avocado, pitted

¼ cup prepared salsa

2 tablespoons reduced-fat sour cream

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

1 cup shredded romaine lettuce

½ cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

Preparation

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven; preheat to 375° F. Bring tomatoes and their juice to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally until the onion is soft and most of the liquid has evaporated, 15 to 20 minutes. Add turkey and cook until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes. Meanwhile, coat tortillas on both sides with cooking spray. Divide the tortillas between 2 large baking sheets. Bake, turning once, until crisped and lightly brown, about 10 minutes. Mash avocado in a bowl. Stir in salsa, sour cream and cilantro until combined. To assemble tostadas, spread each crisped tortilla with some of the avocado mixture. Top with the turkey mixture, lettuce and cheese.

Browse more recipes online:

 www.eatingwell.com

those who do not exercise. The researchers assessed the physical activity levels of more than 400,000 people participating in a medical screening program in Taiwan between 1996 and 2008, with an average follow-up of eight years. Based on the participants' reports of their weekly exercise, they were placed into one of five groups: inactive, low, medium, high or very high.

Researchers calculated the risk of dying and the life expectancy of each group. Compared to those in the inactive group, the people in the low exercise group – who exercised for an average of about 15 minutes a day – had a 14 percent lower risk of death, a 10 percent lower risk of dying of cancer and, on average, a three-year-longer life expectancy. The inactive group had a 17 percent higher risk of death compared to those in the low exercise group.

Every additional 15 minutes of exercise a day beyond the initial 15 minutes further reduced the risk of death by 4 percent and of cancer death by 1 percent. Both men and women, and people of all ages – including those with heart-disease risk factors – benefited equally from

Home safety tips for the holidays

Parents magazine offers some helpful tips for keeping your home safe during the holidays.

■ Inspect Christmas lights each year and discard any with frayed cords, cracked light holders or loose connections.

■ Turn off your Christmas lights when you leave the house and before bedtime.

■ If you choose a real Christmas tree, try to purchase one that's freshly cut, as they are more resistant to ignition. Always keep the tree watered and away from open candles.

■ Use an outdoor timer to switch lights on and off, and also to avoid peak electricity-usage times.

■ Never connect more than one extension cord together. Instead, use a single cord long enough to reach the outlet without stretching, but not so long that it can get easily tangled.

■ When hanging outdoor lights, keep electrical connectors off the ground and away from metal rain gutters.

■ Do not use your gas fireplace if the glass panel is removed, cracked or broken.

■ Test your smoke alarms monthly.

Read more holiday safety tips online:

 www.parents.com

15 minutes of physical activity a day. The bottom line: a small amount of physical activity is good, but more is better.

One key to fitting physical activity into your busy daily life is to turn things you like to do into fitness activities. For example, walk the dog, play catch with your grandchildren or work in your garden.

"The goal here is to disguise your exercise," says Barry Franklin, director of cardiac rehabilitation and exercise laboratories at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich. "We have, as a nation, overemphasized the value of structured exercise, and underemphasized the value of lifestyle physical activity as a way to get more fitness into our lives."

Several studies have shown that becoming more active can provide the same benefits – including improvements in heart-disease risk factors – as structured exercise programs.

"You can actually get as much benefit from daily activity as you can by going to a gym – maybe more," Franklin says.

Mark Fuerst is a Brooklyn-based health and medical writer.

Women veterans pour into VA system

BY TOM PHILPOTT

About 55 percent of women veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are currently enrolled in the VA health-care system, a sign-up rate three times higher than the 17 percent for all generations of women veterans. Part of that higher rate can be traced to a law Congress passed a few years ago guaranteeing all Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, regardless of gender, eligibility for VA care for at least five years.

Dr. Patricia Hayes, chief consultant for women's health services for the Veterans Health Administration, says VA is committed to improving health services for a growing population of women veterans.

In 2008, an internal study documented for the first time the real hurdles and unfriendly culture that women veterans often faced in using VA health care. That is changing rapidly, Hayes says, thanks to improved staff training and cultural awareness programs, the hiring of more female health specialists, and the narrowing of a "gender gap" in offers of preventive health services and screenings.

Hayes and Dr. Sally Haskell, acting director for comprehensive women's health, concede that many challenges remain to reach full equality in access and services, particularly in VA community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). In 2008, only 33 percent of VA health-care facilities offered comprehensive primary care to women. Today, women can get full primary services at 90 percent of larger VA hospitals and medical centers, and at almost 75 percent of clinics, Haskell says.

But too many women who visit clinics must still be referred to larger hospitals, which can mean traveling "hours to get basic primary care for things like birth control, infections and getting their mammograms arranged," Hayes says. Response times for mammograms often exceed six months, a critical amount of time for a life-threatening condition such as breast cancer.

The number of women enrolled in VA health care more than doubled in a decade, hitting

337,000 in October 2011. While VA is still short of gynecologists and other female health specialists, it has closed much of the gender gap for primary care by improving the capabilities of current staff.

Many staff physicians, having cared primarily for men over many years, have tended to refer women to outside providers or larger VA hospitals. But since 2008, VA has given more than 1,500

primary care providers a 40-hour "mini-residency" program on women's health, including maternity care, birth control, abnormal bleeding and female mental-health care, including PTSD.

VA studies also confirmed a disparity in the number of preventive tests and screenings doctors ordered for men vs. women – to track cholesterol in patients with heart disease, for example, or to give blood tests and retinal exams to diabetics. Female patients less often received flu shots and other immunizations and were less likely

to be screened for depression.

Women veterans with service-connected conditions not related to their gender, such as musculoskeletal diseases, have faced difficulty obtaining proper care as well. The American Legion's System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force surveyed women about their VA health-care experiences and found an alarming number of misdiagnoses of life-threatening conditions.

Verna Jones, director of the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division, says that VA has a long way to go in fully meeting the needs of women veterans. "VA has made improvements in its services for women, but more needs to be done," she says. "The SWS Task Force will visit 15 VA medical facilities, focusing on gender-specific and non-gender-specific treatment and care, to report improvements and where improvements need to be made."

Tom Philpott, a former Coast Guardsman, has written about veterans and military personnel issues for more than 30 years.



U.S. Army photo

A TRIBUTE TO AMERICA'S SOLDIERS

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Now, America Remembers proudly honors America's soldiers by introducing a Tribute to America's Soldiers, issued on a working semi-automatic Thompson submachine gun in caliber .45 ACP. This exciting new issue honors both the service of the American Soldier and their legendary partnership with one of the most remarkable infantry weapons of the last hundred years. Craftsmen commissioned specifically by America Remembers decorate each working Thompson in sparkling 24-karat gold and nickel. Don't miss the opportunity to own a genuine Thompson built in the United States by the gunsmiths of the Auto-Ordnance Corporation, the company founded by Brigadier General John T. Thompson himself.

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Once in a great while, a single firearm can change the face of war.

During World War I, heavy, tripod-mounted machine guns pinned infantrymen in their trenches. Because frontal assaults were suicide missions, stalemates lasted for weeks, sometimes months. Retired Army General John T. Thompson wanted to devise a way to give the fight back for the foot soldier. He designed a weapon that could be used as an automatic "trench-broom" to sweep enemy trenches.

By the time America entered World War II, the Thompson was a trusted ally for the infantry. Once called "The deadliest weapon pound for pound, ever devised by man", it was the perfect weapon for the American soldier, who often engaged the enemy face-to-face. The Thompson gave them a huge advantage in close combat fighting and helped turn the tide of countless firefights. Its portability proved crucial to the soldier poking through the bombed out streets of Europe or during the beach landings at Normandy. Anywhere America's dedicated troops saw action you could hear the roar of the Thompson.



▼ On the left side, you'll find two scenes that show the soldier and the Thompson in action. The first scene shows infantrymen landing on the beach during the D-Day invasion. Dodging a hail of bullets and artillery shells, soldiers dragged the Thompson through seawater and sand. Once they reached enemy positions, the last thing they needed was a misfire. The trusty Thompson rarely let them down. Also featured is an outline of the U.S.A. with the words, "Freedom Forever," and a banner reading "Country Before Self," both honoring the selfless contributions of America's Soldiers. At the top center, a Soldier stands firing his Thompson.



▲ The right side features an illustration of a soldier taking aim with his Thompson and banners that read, "Saluting America's Soldiers" and "Defending Freedom". The rest of the action on the right side of the receiver depicts scenes during WWII and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In the North African campaign in WWII, soldiers wielded the Thompson alongside battle tanks during desert warfare. On the front lines in Korea, the soldiers distinguished themselves with the Thompson. Though the struggles and harsh conditions in Korea would push every soldier to the limit, the fighting spirit of America's soldiers carried on. In Vietnam, with helicopters in the background, soldiers relied on their Thompsons, often in the rice paddies and jungles. Though not as common in Vietnam, the Thompson was definitely welcomed by those on patrol or pinned down in a firefight.

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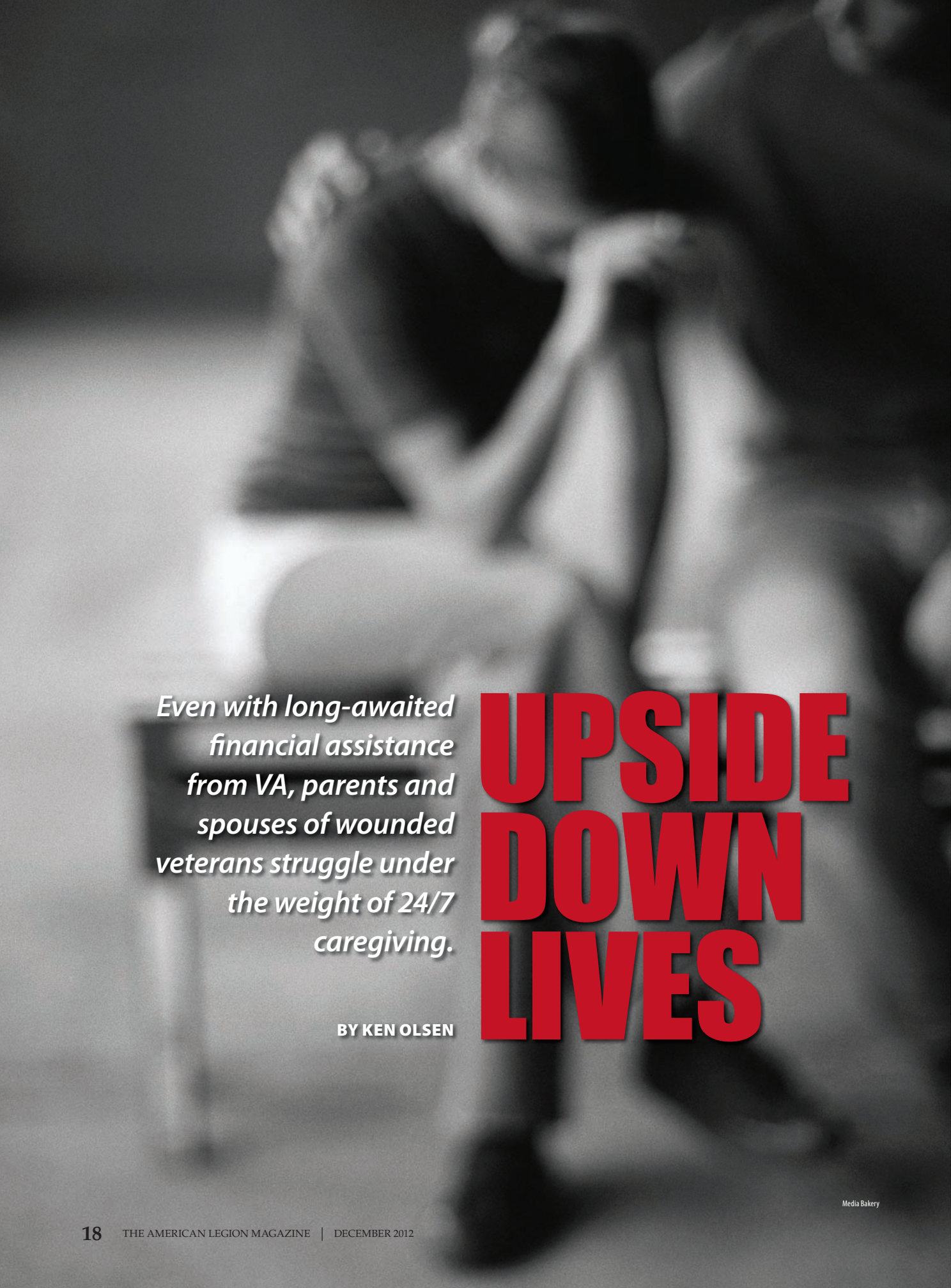
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BY KEN OLSEN

UPSIDE DOWN LIVES

Media Bakery

By the time Debbie Schulz got help, she had been her wounded son's full-time caregiver for more than six years. She had lost her husband, her teaching career and her retirement. She lay awake at night wondering how she was going to get health insurance.

"That blast changed the fabric of our family," Schulz says of the roadside bomb that inflicted a traumatic brain injury (TBI), partial paralysis and vision loss on 20-year-old Steven Schulz during his second tour with the Marines in Iraq. "It's that sort of constant having to rewrite your life and what you are doing."

Yet Schulz is fortunate among caregivers in some respects. Last year, she started receiving a stipend and health insurance under the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, the first federal program to provide assistance directly to families caring for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "As everybody applies and settles into the program, we're realizing how much we needed it," Schulz says. "And we wonder how we ever got by without it."

Schulz and other caregivers also hope that the program, championed by The American Legion and other veterans service organizations, will evolve to meet the realities of caring for injured veterans. High on the list: compensation. Caregivers receive a stipend for a maximum 40-hour workweek – far short of the around-the-clock care many provide, particularly to veterans with brain injuries. "It's truly 24/7, even when they look fairly independent," Schulz says.

Respite care and counseling provided by the legislation are also inadequate and difficult for families to access. In addition, many caregivers of post-9/11 veterans have no idea the program is available.

"I'm still hearing from people who don't know about it," says Karen Francis, an Army wife and military family advocate. "I can't imagine it would be that hard to do phone outreach."

NEW REALITIES. Sarah Wade helped start the drive for caregiver relief in 2005, about a year after her husband, Ted, was blown out of the back of a Humvee in Iraq and suffered TBI, a broken leg and amputation of his right arm. Then-Sen. Hillary Clinton introduced the Heroes at Home Act in 2006, but the measure died.

Wade, military families and VSOs kept up the pressure, and the Senate went to work on a new bill, says Ian de Planque, the Legion's deputy

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director of legislative affairs. But VA opposed caregiver legislation – the agency insisted its mission was to help veterans, not assist families – and the program was painfully slow to launch. The agency didn't start accepting applications until May 2011, a year after the act passed.

Despite this rocky start, the program is making a difference. "There's a system in place, there are families who are getting benefits, and it's doing what it's supposed to be doing," de Planque says.

The result, as Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., noted in a speech marking the anniversary of the act, is that veterans "are home with someone they love at a fraction of the cost of institutional care."

Today, Schulz and Wade are among no fewer than 5,150 caregivers receiving stipends through the post-9/11 veterans caregiver program – 1,000 more than VA had anticipated enrolling by 2015. They receive, on average, between \$600 and \$2,200 a month, based on care needs and local wage rates for home health aides in their area. About 1,200 caregivers also receive health insurance through the program.

The burden on these parents, spouses and siblings is considerable. Many are exhausted, overwhelmed and face decades in roles they never prepared for. "It's a drastic shift to go from coping with being apart to being together 24/7," says Wade, whose husband served with the Army in Afghanistan and Iraq. "And it's not like I was eased into that transition."

Even families with professional caregiving or mental health treatment experience are surprised by the demands. Schulz was a psychiatric social worker for the state of Texas for nine years before becoming a special-education teacher in a Houston suburb. "Both of these careers prepared me for some of the realities of traumatic brain injury," Schulz says, "but not the realities of becoming a caregiver." Her son required help with tasks as simple as getting dressed and brushing his teeth. "It was step by step," she says. "I was exhausted those first six years."

Schulz took a temporary leave from her teaching job after her son was wounded in April 2005, thinking she'd go back to work the following fall. She extended her leave twice – once for six months and then for a year – before she realized that she would never be able to return to the classroom. "Dealing with Steven was a lot like dealing with my class," she says. "I know I couldn't do that during the day and come home at night and deal with Steven's needs."

In addition, Steven couldn't be left by himself.

And Schulz didn't have the resources to hire someone to help him, or the confidence that she could find someone who would take good care of her son. Then her husband died unexpectedly in March 2011.

Elements of Schulz's dilemma are common to families helping injured veterans.

"People are really struggling with their role as caregivers," says Joan Griffin, a researcher with the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and an associate professor of medicine at the University of Minnesota Medical School. She led a 2009 study of caregivers. "It's incredibly hard."

Post-9/11 caregivers deal with far different issues than those helping veterans from earlier conflicts, who are more likely to suffer from cancer or chronic diseases than combat-related injuries, Griffin says. Because they are helping Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, they are typically younger and face a lifetime of caregiving. They often take care of veterans with multiple injuries – such as TBI, amputations and other wounds – who might not have survived earlier wars. Because of their age, post-9/11 caregivers are unlikely to have peers also taking care of a veteran, leaving them isolated and invisible.

The strain goes both ways. "I think the level of stress is pretty great for veterans and caregivers," Griffin says. "A lot of times with brain injuries, veterans can remember what they were like before the brain injury. The caregivers mourn who they've lost and the things they used to do, just as the veterans mourn who they used to be."

"You are asking some very young people to take on something they never thought they would have to take on," Francis adds. "You reach the point you want your own life too."

LONELY ROAD. Count 32-year-old Lee Karcher among the frustrated. Her husband, Mark, came home from his third deployment with TBI, PTSD, and knee, back and shoulder injuries. He suffers from migraine headaches, a hernia, acid reflux, sleeplessness and depression. He has not been able to find a job since he was honorably discharged from the Army and returned to southern Oregon in September 2010.

"I sent him to war a whole, healthy strong man and they returned a broken shell of a man to me," says Karcher, who cares for her husband and six children ages 6 to 13. "It can be a very lonely road. It's like having another child – a disturbed child, on top of that."

Negotiating the veterans benefits system has been



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Lee Karcher's husband, Mark, returned from deployment with TBI, PTSD, depression and various injuries. On top of raising six children, Lee acts as Mark's caregiver. Photo by Scott Spilker

arduous and confusing. “We’ve been told something different at four different VAs,” Karcher says. “Eventually you get to the right person, but we spend several hours a week chasing information.”

Karcher learned about the caregiver program from Mark’s VA psychiatrist. Lee, who was designated his official caregiver in August 2011, receives a monthly stipend of about \$1,200 – the equivalent of about \$8 an hour for a 40-hour work week. But that extra income cost the Karchers most of their food stamp benefits.

That’s an unfair trade, she says. “It’s like, ‘Thanks for your service to our country. Now get out of here.’”

High co-pays also prevent Karcher, who has Crohn’s disease, from using the health insurance she receives through the caregiver program. And she is too busy homeschooling children with special dietary needs, and getting her husband to medical appointments in four different cities, to take advantage of the caregiver respite or counseling programs.

Assuming the role of single parent, however, has been the hardest part of this upside-down life. “I need a second adult in the house to be an example, to be a disciplinarian, to give kisses and a hug, to be an extra set of hands,” Karcher says. “To have that go downhill is, as a mother, really hard to

watch.” Still, Karcher remains committed. “At times, things feel really bleak,” she says. “But I am a faith-based person. I feel the angels have been there pulling my load. There are still times of peace and love.”

This sort of resilience is typical among caregivers Griffin encounters in her research. “I am amazed by their spirit,” she says. “I never finish (a caregiver) interview without thinking, ‘I can’t believe how they have persevered.’ It’s heartbreaking and heartwarming at the same time.”

Griffin and her team surveyed 564 family members caring for veterans discharged from VA polytrauma treatment centers. The results are both encouraging and cautionary. Thirty percent of the caregivers said their veterans needed very little help. “That’s a sign that rehabilitation works,” she says. “My hopeful side is that a certain portion do get better and go on to lead functional lives.”

Even so, 22 percent are completely consumed by their roles. Half of these “high-intensity caregivers” are providing care more than 80 hours a week, Griffin says. “That is a pretty vulnerable group that needs a lot of support.” And their stress doesn’t subside over time, as some might expect.

“The take-home message is that the consequences of war extend far beyond the veteran who has fought, to families and communities,” Griffin says. “Those consequences will extend a long time, and families and communities are not well-prepared for what that takes. VA has a role in setting that up.”

DIGNITY AND EQUALITY. Going forward, families and veterans advocates hope that VA’s role will include revamping respite care and caregiver counseling. “Neither are easy to access or appropriately provided,” Schulz says.

Indeed, Wade’s options for respite care include leaving her husband at a VA hospital, nursing home or similar institution for up to 30 days a year. But he would be miserable in such a restrictive environment with an older population, she says. “I was adamant, because of our experiences, that respite care be age-appropriate for the veteran,” Wade says of her work to help draft the legislation. “That isn’t happening.”

For the Wades, another option is using a home health agency of VA’s choice. But Ted says he’s uncomfortable having a stranger caring for him at home, and Sarah is leery of leaving him with someone not well-versed in his needs. “They typically aren’t experienced with cognitive and neurobehavioral issues (such as TBI and PTSD) and they aren’t trained to deal with mental health



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CAREGIVER RESOURCES

Congress directed the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a national caregiver support program when it passed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. The program offers a stipend and the possibility of health insurance for caregivers of post-9/11 veterans. It also includes training and support services for caregivers of all veterans, no matter when they served.

Go online to fill out an application for caregiver benefits or for answers to questions about the program:

www.caregiver.va.gov

VA Caregiver Support Line
1-855-260-3274

Other resources include:

- **American Veterans with Brain Injuries** offers weekly online chat groups for veterans and caregivers to share experiences, frustrations, fears and anything else. www.avbi.org
- **Her War, Her Voice** offers retreats for caregivers, raises money to provide counseling for military families, and works with a partner organization, Not Alone, to offer support groups for caregivers, warriors, veterans and military spouses. www.herwarhervoice.com
- **The National Alliance for Caregiving** trains and assists civilian and military caregivers. www.caregiving.org

issues,” Wade says. “Polytrauma care can’t be cookie-cutter. Each individual has unique issues that compound each other.”

The fix is straightforward, caregivers say. Families should be able to hire an approved provider of their choice to stay with a veteran when they need the help. “I don’t expect VA to be able to provide it all,” Wade says. “Leverage community resources to provide the best and most appropriate care.”

VA officials say they’re open to making changes. “We’re aware we have work to do in this arena,” says Deborah Amdur, VA’s chief consultant for care management and social work. “We are working with our community partners on alternatives.” VA also hopes to introduce an alternative telephone support program to help caregivers who cannot access the current counseling options.

VA and caregivers, however, are still at odds over increasing caregiver stipends to recognize the 24/7 strain on families. VA says it will contract with home health agencies to supplement family

caregiving where it’s deemed necessary for more than 40 hours a week, Amdur says. “We understand the significant burden many of these families are under and want to support them with supplemental care in the home as needed. We know the stipend does not replace employment. It is meant to be a recognition of sacrifices the family caregivers make.”

For caregivers, however, this reinforces how poorly VA understands the situation. “We wrote this bill because home health agencies were either an inappropriate resource or limited as far as usefulness,” Wade says. “Ted’s doctor has said since 2005 that a home health agency is clinically inappropriate care. Shouldn’t that be enough?”

Caregivers are also mystified by VA’s willingness to spend huge sums of money on home health agencies instead of assistance appropriate for young veterans with a range of complex physical and cognitive injuries. “The idea isn’t to simply put the veteran somewhere and keep them alive,” Wade says. “If VA is willing to spend the money for Ted to be miserable with a home health agency or a group home and separate him from society, why would they not be willing to use that money to provide quality of life and further his independence as well?” she continues. “Our country owes it to Ted to treat him with dignity and equality.”

Outside of VA, meanwhile, there is broad support for expanding the post-9/11 caregiver assistance program to families caring for veterans of all eras.

“I know that would be very costly,” Schulz says. “But it sort of puts a rift between generations when one gets it and, for the others, it’s ‘Oh, no, you can’t have it.’”

“I’ve fielded a lot of calls from people who say, ‘I’ve taken care of my husband since Vietnam,’” de Planque adds. “I have a lot of sympathy for that. We hope to get that changed and are working toward that goal.”

VA will present a report to Congress on the feasibility of expanding the program next spring, but there’s no indication where that will lead. Despite the flaws in the caregivers act, families of post-9/11 veterans can’t imagine being able to do this work without the assistance.

“Without the caregiver stipend and attached benefits,” Schulz says, “I would probably be much like I was for the first six years – treading water, but never knowing what event may come along and sink me.” 🌿

Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.

Ohio factory reborn; 250 new hires for EdenPURE® portable heaters

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Richard Karn, North Canton, Ohio

I was fortunate enough to attend the grand opening of the new EdenPURE® factory in North Canton, Ohio. The new plant brought hundreds of new jobs back to Ohio and reversed the common practice of sending Midwest manufacturing jobs to China. Now, EdenPURE® continues to ramp up production for the coming Winter with exciting new models and hundreds of new employees as this Made in America success story continues to grow.

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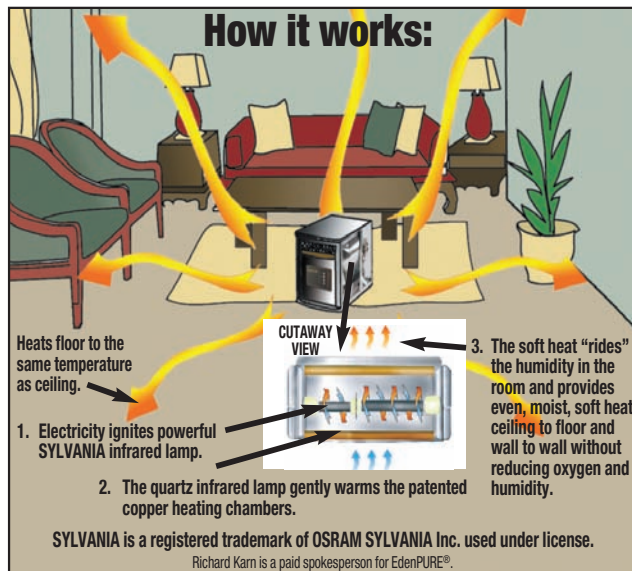
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SPARTANS OF SENEGAL

*Trained by U.S. forces, West Africans fight
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BY MARK SEAVEY

*Sgt. Erick Constantino of Special Purpose Marine
Air-Ground Task Force-Africa instructs a Senegalese
commando during a land navigation exercise.*

Photo by Marine Lt. Dominic William Pitrone

“Êtes vous fatigué?!”

Marine Corps Sgt. Robert Keane's French is far from perfect, but he knows how to indignantly bark to his men the question – “Are you tired?!” – as only a recon Marine can.

In unison, the Company Fusiliers Marine Commandos (COFUMACO), along with 14 Marines, four U.S. Navy sailors and two representatives of the West African nation of Togo, shout back in response, “*Jamais!*” (“Never!”)

Keane grins and asks the question twice more. Each time, the same hearty response: “*Jamais!*”

Members of COFUMACO grin back at the sergeant, knowing that pushups are next. It was a good morning on the rifle range, so what better way to celebrate than with physical training?

Once everyone has assumed the position, Keane looks around to make sure no one is slacking.

“*En bas!*” he commands. (“Down!”) Every man shouts out the cadence: “*Un, deux, trois ...*”

The men are still smiling. For each of the final five pushups, Keane shouts out, “We are ...”

And the Senegalese soldiers shout back in reply, “COFUMACO!”

Beacon of Freedom. This is Senegal. Like most nations bordering the Sahara Desert, its population is largely Muslim, but the government and culture here are more like Islamic countries of the Far East, such as Indonesia, than the violent, unstable regimes of the Middle East and North Africa.

The Senegalese, for example, are free to practice the faith of their choice in whatever manner they wish, with little or no social or political blowback. As my interpreter and tour guide, Chereif Ndiaye, told me, “It’s not all that unusual for a family to have some members be Muslim, others Catholic and even some animists. Occasionally some family members are ostracized, but it is incredibly rare and never leads to outright violence.”

Women have equal rights in Senegal under the law, but literacy rates suggest that the education system needs work. Fifty-one percent of Senegalese men are able to read and write, compared to 29 percent of women. The nation is making progress in this area of equal opportunity by appointing women to decision-making positions within the government and legal professions.

For its efforts, Senegal has been recognized as a developing liberal democracy and potential beacon of freedom in West Africa. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a speech in Dakar last July, “If anyone doubts whether democracy can flourish in African soil, let them come to Senegal.”

Last March, following a hard-fought presidential campaign only occasionally marred by protests and violence, Abdoulaye Wade was ousted by Macky Sall, the former leader of the Senegalese Congress. In a sign of how far Senegal has come, the loser called to congratulate the winner – a first in Senegal – and put out a statement: “On this day ... President Abdoulaye Wade ... wish(es incoming President Sall) good luck in his mission at the head of Senegal in the hopes that he will render the Senegalese happy. In this way, Senegal, through a transparent election, has once again proven that she remains a great democracy – a great country.”

“It was a great day for Senegal no matter who you voted for,” Ndiaye recalls. “It proves that Senegal’s national devotion to hospitality and friendship amongst all Senegalese was more than just empty words.”

U.S. Ambassador to Senegal Lewis Lukens agrees with Ndiaye’s assessment. “What is unique to Senegal (is that its military) does not play a role in politics the way it does elsewhere,” he says. “The army will not enter that arena. (It) only exists to protect the institutions.” A relatively calm presidential succession and the military’s absence from politics “enhances Senegal’s role as regional military experts.”

Senegal, however, has many of the same troubles faced by other African nations – a low-intensity civil war, for example. In the southern Casamance region, an ethnic group called the Jola wants to secede. This year, 20 Senegalese soldiers were killed fighting the insurgent Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance. Restoring peace in that region is a top priority for Senegal, Sall says.

Soft Power. In his 1990 book “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power,” Harvard University professor Joseph Nye Jr. advanced the concept of “soft power,” by which a country uses its ability to attract or co-opt, rather than coerce, use force or give money, as a means of persuasion.

“A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it,” Nye wrote. “In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions. This soft power – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them.”

Decades ago, China made some early soft-power efforts to engage West Africa. Evidence is found across Dakar, including the Léopold Sédar Senghor Stadium, which can accommodate 60,000 soccer fans and is one of the largest structures in the city. Visitors ride on buses the Chinese brought in to provide cheap public transportation; they also built a large hospital in the city.

Even so, the Senegalese don't gush over their Asian benefactors, largely because China used only Chinese construction workers rather than locals, 50 percent of whom are unemployed. And while Senegal has long been a hub of textile manufacturing, the influx of cheap Chinese fabrics has forced many local producers out of business.

Clinton acknowledged that legacy last summer. "The days of having outsiders come and extract the wealth of Africa for themselves, leaving nothing or very little behind, should be over in the 21st century," she said, reiterating President Barack Obama's vow during a 2009 visit to Ghana that the United States would offer Africa "partnership, not patronage."

Lukens said that contrary to the way China handled its construction work in Senegal, the United States has hired 900 Senegalese to help build its new embassy in Dakar, and the project provides job training for workers and managers alike.

AFRICOM's Mission. In 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced the creation of a unified U.S. military command for Africa that would seek "a more effective and integrated approach than the current arrangement of dividing Africa between Central Command (CENTCOM) and European Command (EUCOM)."

Steven Morrison, director of the Africa program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said such a command would create new opportunities for the United States, including greater competition with China, India and others for influence and access, and "rising commitments with respect to global health." And President George W. Bush said AFRICOM would "enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy and economic growth."

Headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, AFRICOM covers the entire continent except Egypt, which remains in CENTCOM's area of responsibility. AFRICOM itself has numerous components representing each of the service branches and Special



Maj. Tommy Waller, Ponchatoula, La.

The team leader in Senegal, Waller grew up dreaming of joining the Marine Corps. He says he "played Marine" for eight years as a JROTC cadet and NROTC midshipman in high school, and at Tulane University on an NROTC

scholarship. He became an infantry officer in 2002 and served as infantry platoon commander in Boat Company 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Command), then as weapons platoon commander and executive officer in Bravo Company 1st Battalion 6th Marines in Afghanistan in 2004 and Iraq in 2005. Waller also served as a reconnaissance platoon commander in 2nd Recon Battalion, deploying to al-Anbar province again in 2006. In 2007 and 2008, he taught at Officer Candidates School, where he was the first recipient of the Capt. Robert M. Secher Scholarship, attending the Wharton School of Business. In 2009, Waller left active duty and joined 3rd Force Recon Company as a Marine reservist while pursuing entrepreneurship in the civilian sector. He's married to his high school sweetheart, Rebecca, and has two sons, Oran and Trygg.

Operations forces, which are engaged in countering al-Qaida in and around the Horn of Africa. U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa (MARFORAF) has units scattered across the continent.

When I asked who's doing good work that hasn't been well publicized, the answer was almost universal: Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) Africa.

SPMAGTF-Africa is a composite unit of about 125 reserve Marines and sailors from 32 different units, "tailored to conduct multiple, simultaneous, small and widely dispersed security cooperation activities, yet retain the ability to quickly aggregate for a larger-scale crisis response."

The first rotation of SPMAGTF Marines conducted theater-security cooperation missions in Liberia, Djibouti, Burundi and Uganda. The current rotation has had teams of 15 or more Marines in Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti and Senegal.

Another team of Marines from SPMAGTF is aboard ship, helping train defense forces and participating in community service projects in Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Liberia, Congo, Kenya and Ghana. Finally, several tactical contact teams of two or three Marines each work with partner-nation forces in Tanzania, Kenya, Tunisia, Uganda, Botswana and Liberia.

SPMAGTF-Africa is commanded by Lt. Col. Gerard Wynn of 3rd Force Reconnaissance Company out of Mobile, Ala., who arrived in Dakar to check on his troops about the time I got

GET BACK IN THE WATER SAFELY: A SAFE STEP TO COMFORT AND INDEPENDENCE



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*BAKALAR, NICHOLAS. "Watch Your Step While Washing Up." New York Times 16, Aug. 2011, New York Edition ed., Section D sec.: D7, Web **CDC - Center for Disease Control and Prevention



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there last summer. Back home, Wynn works in law enforcement and is generally quiet, until you get him talking about the role of his unit and its mix of active-duty and reserve personnel.

"I have guys who back in the states are bar owners in New York City, a lawyer, one guy who is in medical school with an undergraduate degree from Harvard, a bunch of firemen and paramedics – just a host of guys who bring other skill sets with them from outside the military," Wynn says.

Wynn's team leader in Senegal, Maj. Tommy Waller of Louisiana, can top that. "I have a stuntman," he says, laughing. "He does stuff in the movies. If they ever need a replacement for the Dos Equis guy, this Marine could fit the bill as the most interesting man in the world."

Friendly and energetic, Waller is described by his men as a true believer. "He will do anything to further the mission of training our African partners," one Marine tells me. "He buys into the concept 100 percent, and the major doesn't rest if there is a chance to either improve the training or work more with the indigenous forces."

Waller's unit in Toubacouta, Senegal, has 15 Marines and four sailors, all selected for their own special skill sets. Three of the Marines are graduates of the prestigious Reconnaissance Course run by the Marine Corps School of Infantry special ops branch.

One of them is Keane, who, in addition to leading the Senegalese soldiers in their daily regimen of pushups, serves as my guide through COFUMACO training. At 26, he's exactly what one would expect in terms of physical abilities, and he's intellectual as well, with plans to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to study aeronautical engineering.



Sgt. Robert Keane, Pensacola, Fla.

When he first approached a Marine recruiter, Keane was assured that reconnaissance was perfect for him, and that he could serve his country and quickly get back to school. More than seven years later, Keane's still on active duty as one of

SPMAGTF's training NCOs. A graduate of Amphibious Reconnaissance School and Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) School, Keane is also a combatant dive supervisor and High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) certified jump master. Having served in South America, Iraq, Spain, Rwanda, Tanzania, Senegal and Italy, his No. 1 goal now is to return to the United States, finish a degree in aeronautical engineering and marry his fiancée, Amber.

"I didn't want to waste my parents' money, so I decided to pay for my schooling," Keane says. "I went down to the recruiter and signed up for recon. He said I'd do my training and come home ... that was seven years and three months ago."

Relationship Training. Supplies and equipment can be hard to come by for COFUMACO. On a day devoted to land navigation, map reading and terrain model training, Keane and another recon Marine, Sgt. Erick Constantino, ask the group to pull out their maps, protractors and compasses.

Among the 30 commandos, no one moves.

The Marines go about scrounging up some protractors and compasses. One makes photocopies of the only map available, but the scale gets messed up in the reproduction, making what had been 1,000 meters now 900.

Even without all the proper tools, the squad's navigator finds all three points marked on the map. The first movement is 590 meters, and using dead reckoning through the jungle terrain, the navigator stops 46 meters from the first objective. The unit silently passes information through hand and arm signals. The Senegalese assault through the objective, stopping at the target and taking up concealed locations around an orange panel that marks the spot.

"I was proud to see they remembered what they were taught two months ago and were able to execute a perfect land navigation with rudimentary tools at best," Keane says. "When you're using a low-quality photocopy of a map – which changes the scale, in 100 percent humidity, when the paper is falling apart – having the fortitude to not give up on it and do 'whatever it takes to accomplish the mission' (a recon motto) is a sign of the exemplary characteristics that these COFUMACO have demonstrated time and again in different circumstances."

The Marines and sailors in Toubacouta provide the African commandos with a full spectrum of military training, including marksmanship, land navigation and patrolling, and various riverine boat operations such as interdictions, personnel searches and hide setup.

As James Adams, sergeant major of SPMAGTF, said on the anniversary of 9/11 this year, "Our primary mission here is to train our African partners and bridge the gaps through personal relationships."

Marksmanship training is impressive. "These guys are sent into combat down in the Casamance with a basic combat load of less than 10 percent of what my Marines carry," Waller says. "They don't

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have enough rounds to adequately train their troops, much less enough to give them the full basic complement of ammunition that my Marines generally get.”

Even so, the COFUMACO commandos handle the range with little oversight. “The fact that they can call, shoot, coach and run their own firing line effectively is a sign of huge advancement in their training,” Keane says. “The key for us is giving them the knowledge and motivation to pass down the training to other troops.”

Several days are devoted to waterborne activities. Navy Chief Master-At-Arms Anwar Blakely leads classes on how to operate the Zodiac boats that the Senegalese forces use in the Casamance.

“We learned a lot of new techniques for shooting, patrolling, reconnaissance and riverine operations,” COFUMACO Lt. Giallo Mountaga explains. “Down in the Casamance we do a lot of river patrolling to deny enemy movements, so the boat-operations classes are perhaps the most useful to us.”

The New 300. The weeklong training is capped by a graduation ceremony, which begins with Waller displaying a map showing the locations of the U.S. embassy attacks in Libya and Egypt and other acts of violence across Africa in September.

Pins mark the locations, but most of West Africa is noticeably bare. Senegal and the countries surrounding it are clear. “It’s up to you guys to keep it that way,” Waller tells the commandos.

After presenting the Senegalese sharpshooters with awards and certificates, Waller gives two soldiers special tourniquets. “We gave these guys tourniquets, and they saved lives,” he says. “That means we’ve helped not only COFUMACO, but saved lives doing it. That’s how we will build relationships here.”

Waller concludes his speech by asking the Senegalese if anyone is familiar with the story of the Spartans at Thermopylae. One hand shoots up. The commando summarizes the tale of the 300 Spartan warriors who fought at the pass in Thermopylae, Greece, in 480 B.C., to hold off the invading Persians long enough for the Hellenic states to mobilize to meet the threat.

Waller says that COFUMACO, like the Spartans, numbers 300, and they’re tasked with stopping terrorism from creeping into West Africa. The graduates listen intently, nodding. Their motto is “*On nous tue, on ne nous déshonore pas*,” which, roughly translated, means, “We can be killed but not dishonored.”



Engineer 2nd Class Douglas Collins, Atlanta

An active-duty sailor from Atlanta attached to SPMAGTF, Collins is assigned to Riverine Squadron (RIVRON) 3 out of Naval Weapons Station Yorktown. The squadron’s primary mission is to conduct stability operations, provide maritime security along rivers and other inland waterways and train military personnel of partner nations in riverine operations. Collins is a graduate of the Navy’s Outboard Engine School. In Senegal, he taught the commandos of COFUMACO boat maintenance and tactics with the waterborne guard posts and interdictions. “We also show them how to do vessel board searches and seizures, formations, and land contact from boat while executing formations,” Collins says. The overall goal is “to put effective rounds on target from the boats.”

Lt. Col. Daniel Jones, the Army’s military attaché for Senegal, would like to see such partnerships multiply across Africa. “While foremost in our mind is maintaining the strategic vision for the United States,” he says, “we also want to reinforce success in the region by rewarding militaries like Senegal that support democracy, and steer clear of trying to impact the politics in the country or the broader region.”

Earlier in my stay, while driving through Toubacouta – the town in which the Marines trained COFUMACO – Waller noticed that the Senegalese flag in front of the tribal chief’s house is in poor condition. He asked two Marines to purchase a couple of new ones on their next trip to Dakar.

On my last day in Toubacouta, we go into town and deliver one flag to the village elder and the other to the prefect. The elder is responsible for most everything that happens in the town, resolving disputes and watching over the people. The prefect is a representative of the government in Dakar. Each of the men gratefully receives the flag.

The elder, whose son translates for us, asks if we could bow our heads while he prays for our safety.

The prefect is likewise moved. “We recognize that terrorism is moving this way across Africa,” he says. “And so you noticing things like our flag, and coming here to meet with us with Marines, Senegalese gendarmerie, our Togo brothers and others, means a lot to us.”

Waller responds with a nod. “We all want the same thing: to keep our families safe.” 🌿

Mark Seavey is editor of *The American Legion’s Burn Pit* blog.

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AFRICOM's 'light footprint'

BY BEN BARBER

Africa Command (AFRICOM) – just six years old, and the newest of the U.S. military's regional commands – finds itself in the midst of many small but complicated conflicts, from chasing the Lord's Resistance Army in the jungles near Congo to dealing with terrorist groups in the Sahara Desert.

Based at Stuttgart, Germany – partly because African states feared that hosting it would smack of colonialism – AFRICOM is charged with fostering positive military relations with 54 countries spread over a vast and underdeveloped continent. AFRICOM does not have its own troops; the command borrows them from the Army, Air Force, Marines, Special Operations and other Pentagon assets. Its first combat mission came in 2011, supporting the no-fly zone over Libya during the rebel ouster of Moammar Gadhafi.

AFRICOM has trained military personnel in dozens of countries, including landlocked Mali, nearly twice the size of Texas. But in March, a Mali soldier who received military education and training in the United States led a coup that toppled the democratic government of the West African nation. Such upheaval is what many Africans feared when AFRICOM was announced in 2007 – that it would give too much power and skill to soldiers in desperately poor countries with weak governments, inviting local armies to take over.

Those behind the coup were angry that they lacked the weapons and training to battle rebel Tuareg nomads and al-Qaida sympathizers who had fought for Gadhafi and came to Mali with stolen high-powered weapons. The rebels had seized northern Mali, set up training camps for groups linked to al-Qaida, and terrorized locals with amputations and floggings.

It's unfair to blame AFRICOM for the Mali crisis, which is widely considered to be a side effect of the Arab Spring. AFRICOM's commander, Army Gen. Carter Ham, rushed to deal with the fallout. In September, he visited Mauritania during a swing

through West Africa to prepare for an African-led military effort that would deal with northern Mali. In mid-October, no outside intervention had begun and the Islamists ruled northern Mali.

Ham told Congress earlier this year that he plans to keep AFRICOM headquartered in Stuttgart because, in Africa, "a light footprint is consistent with what we need." On Oct. 18, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that Ham would be succeeded by Gen. David Rodriguez.

AFRICOM lists its priorities as deterring or defeating al-Qaida and other violent extremist organizations, strengthening the defense capabilities of key African states, ensuring U.S. access to and through Africa in support of global requirements, helping protect Africans from mass atrocities and providing military support to humanitarian assistance efforts.

AFRICOM has 1,200 staff members at Stuttgart – mainly civilians – and several hundred intelligence officials providing additional support. Another





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U.S. Marines and sailors lead Senegalese commandos in waterborne tactical training. Photo by Marine Lt. Dominic William Pitrone

2,000 U.S. troops and civilians are part of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. The U.S. military also has access to military bases in 12 other African countries, according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

AFRICOM requested \$295 million in funding for 2012, with CJTF-HOA receiving separate funding of \$318 million. This year, some \$46 million of AFRICOM's budget went to Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara, a counterterrorism effort sure to see more activity after the Islamist seizure of northern Mali and other threats in the poor and weakly governed region.

In July 2010, the Government Accountability Office released a report critical of AFRICOM, stating that the command needs more cultural training and greater long-term planning to assure that it does not make mistakes in the charged environment of the world's poorest continent. This is crucial, since AFRICOM has inherited an array of missions including HIV awareness, humanitarian operations delivering food and water, piracy interdiction and other "soft-power" tasks.

"We want to help develop a stable environment in which civil society can be built and that the quality of life for the citizenry can be improved," a DoD official said in a 2011 CRS report. Yet the highly unequal budgets of DoD, the State Department and USAID make it difficult for them to act as equal partners and could lead to the "militarization of development and diplomacy."

John Campbell – former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria and senior fellow for Africa policy studies at the Council of Foreign Relations – has long been concerned about potential problems created by the emergence of AFRICOM.

"There are examples of U.S. training of African military types who later staged coups (in places such as) Niger, Rwanda," Campbell said. "In some circles in Africa – democratic circles – there is

unease about American training of African militaries because of that history."

Though many African countries see U.S. military training as an opportunity to interact with a major world power and learn about modern warfare, Campbell believes the United States may have erred by not laying the groundwork for AFRICOM with "long-term public relations and information programs ... to win over elite opinion to the idea."

He added, "In technical terms, the training is OK, but the question is what the training will be used for. Many Africans are afraid that training will be used to repress opposition groups."

Nevertheless, AFRICOM can claim some success. It helped pacify Libya before a militia led a raid that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three aides in September. AFRICOM had 16 troops there, but the State Department ruled they were not needed and sent them home in August.

AFRICOM's other activities include air and land combat training with Moroccan troops, maritime interdiction exercises in Nigeria, and counterterrorism training for small units of partner nations in North and West Africa.

Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, describes himself as a fan of AFRICOM but says he is unsure about its future.

"AFRICOM couldn't find a home on the continent" because President Bush announced it rather suddenly, and he "was seen as a president who used force more than many countries would have wished," O'Hanlon says. "The new command aimed to serve partnership rather than action. But conspiracy theories about AFRICOM had legs and limited the number of troops on the continent."

Nevertheless, Ham believes that AFRICOM has made valuable inroads, saying that he's been encouraged by African leaders' willingness to confront challenges and embrace opportunities.

"I sincerely believe that, in the long run, it is Africans who are best able to address African security challenges," Ham told the Senate Armed Forces Committee in March. "Because of this and because a safe, secure and stable Africa is in the United States' national interest, we at U.S. Africa Command will continue to strive to be the security partner of choice on the continent." 🌿

Ben Barber has been a journalist for more than 30 years. His book, "GROUNDTRUTH: At Work, Play and War in the Third World," will be published by de.MO in 2013.

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THE CONTENDER

How competitive shooting at an American Legion post gave a teenager the confidence to achieve his dreams.

BY GERRY SOUTER

I made my way through grammar school on Chicago's South Side.

I had no marketable skills.

I couldn't throw a football spiral, hit a baseball or catch one. On skates of any kind, I was a disaster, and my bicycle-riding prowess threatened to change my voice from alto to tenor every time I braked and made intimate contact with my Schwinn's center bar. I was short, my mom bought my clothes in the husky department at Sears, and I wore glasses. In effect, as an American boy, I was a failure.



Photo by Eldon Lindsey

But there was one thing I discovered while lying on a crusty old mattress in a damp crawl space under a friend's house: I could shoot the center out of a target at 50 feet consistently enough to earn my Boy Scout Marksmanship merit badge. Now, what do you do with a skill like that? I had only one choice. I joined the South Shore High School ROTC and tried out for the battalion rifle team.

My sports history had taught me that close-order drill, learning the nomenclature of an M1 rifle and taking orders from squeaky-voiced lieutenants were preferable to climbing a rope, becoming a dodgeball casualty or collecting damp towels in a hamper after swim class.

Sadly, my tryout for the rifle team followed my established pattern. The Army 1922 Springfield rifle defeated everything I had learned while wielding a simpler, lighter, basic Stevens .22 in that smelly crawl space. The Army sergeant in charge of the tryouts suggested I stick to learning to field-strip rifles and leave the shooting to those more qualified. That just about did it for me. I had nothing. I was a wildebeest in lion country.

Gavin Scobie, a kid I knew who ran with a different gang a few blocks from my patch, witnessed my red-faced, teary defeat at the ROTC range. He asked me if I still wanted to learn to shoot. I thought I knew how, but evidence to the contrary had left me with a hot face, a dry mouth and a crushed spirit. He offered to take me to where he did his shooting every Friday night. I just nodded.

American Legion Post 175 at 75th Street and Coles Avenue lit up its piece of the street with welcoming neon and blazing lights above a glass door. A meeting hall and neighborhood bar, it was always filled with World War II and Korean War veterans. Gavin led me past the door to a path alongside the building that went into the deep and silent dark. I feared the dark. Nothing good ever happened to me where it was dark. I followed him to stairs that led down to a basement door lit by a single 40-watt bulb. Muffled sounds came from

behind the door: Krung! Krung! Krung! Gavin pushed through the door, and I stepped into the rest of my life.

The "Krung!" became "Krang!" as rifle shots banged behind a wood curtain between the club room and the actual five-position rifle range. The room smelled of Hoppe's No. 9 powder solvent,

gun oil, leather pads on shooting coats hanging from pegs, and the suffusing scent that once sniffed is never forgotten: smokeless gunpowder. At a table, a blonde girl wearing an Al Freeland 10-X padded shooting coat covered with rifle match brassards looked up at me, smiled and went back to loading .22 Winchester match bullets into a drilled wood shooting block. Shooters trooped from the range back into the club room, carrying their personal heavy-barrel match rifles to the long rack above a scoring table. The last man through the door,

filling it as he passed, paused and looked at me. He was the oldest man in the room and looked like he must have hash marks running up both sleeves.

"Doc," said Gavin, "this is a new recruit who wants to shoot. Gerry, this is Doc Meissner, the range boss."

Dr. Arthur Meissner, ophthalmologist and Camp Perry veteran, stood about 6 feet tall, with a balding head sparsely thatched with finger-combed strands of brownish hair. His eyes were deep-set. They missed nothing behind thick spectacles. He carried a scuffed Bausch & Lomb spotting scope in one hand and scoring sheets in the other. Doc examined me without enthusiasm.

"Can you shoot?" he piped in a voice shaped by command and eroded by whiskey.

I had brought my Boy Scout merit badge sash and unfolded it to show the Marksmanship award. He squinted at the olive fabric spotted with colorful merit doodads. Sliding a chew of tobacco around the inside of his mouth, Doc looked from badge to badge.

"I see you can burn oatmeal over an open fire, you know how t' find the Big Dipper and you



After failing to make his high school ROTC's battalion rifle team, Souter (standing, second from left) honed his shooting skills at American Legion Post 175 in Chicago. He eventually became the ROTC team's co-captain.

Photo courtesy Gerry Souter

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know a hammer from a screwdriver.” He looked closer at my merit badges. “The one with the concentric circles – that mean you know one end of a rifle from the other?”

“Yessir,” I answered, fighting the urge to salute.

“Never made officer,” Doc said. “Mustered out as a top kick.” He turned, surveyed the rifle rack and selected – *groan* – a Springfield .22. “C’mon, let’s see if you can put a few down range without hurting anybody.”

Of all the rifles made by all the gun manufacturers in the world, why did he have to pick that one? My stomach started its familiar churn as I followed him to an open shooting mat. He squatted down on a little stool next to me as I fitted the prone sling loop over my left bicep and sank to my knees. He put a loaded shooting block of .22 long rifle standard-velocity ammunition in front of my right elbow.

“Let’s dry-fire for a while first,” he said. I slid the bolt closed. The front sight was a circle into which I maneuvered the round black target 50 feet distant, and then centered that picture in the rear sight aperture. This was more precise than the ROTC post front sight. I squeezed and the trigger broke clean, snapping the firing pin against the rim of the empty breech. When the sight settled back, the target had slid to the right. I moved my left elbow to the left a fraction, worked the bolt, held my breath and squeezed again. After the click, the target remained at dead center in the concentric sight circles. His voice was still flat as he got up – with some effort – off his stool and took the spotting scope to the table at the back of the dark range.

“Give me five on target No. 3.” Surveying the firing line, he added, “Fire when ready.”

I began shooting and he began suggesting small tweaks to my style and technique. An hour later, I was shooting the center out of every target. At last, for once in my life, I was a contender.

The American Legion team was a melting pot of young people coming from a cross section of South Side homes. Gavin came from a blue-collar family and competed with an unusual Al Freeland BSA Martini target rifle. At 17, Jim Preston was the oldest, and had a custom hot rod built from a 1949 Oldsmobile “bubble” coupe with a V8 sporting dual 4-barrel carbs under the hood. He could afford a beautiful Anschutz heavy barrel .22.

Our most celebrated shooter was Diane Guest with her Winchester Model 75. She elevated everybody’s effort and attitude. She and I still correspond today, and she wrote to me, “I was

15 when American Legion Post 175 gave me the opportunity to join its rifle club. Both my brothers were members, and Doc taught me the proper handling of a firearm. I practiced and worked my way up the ladder of junior awards and eventually achieved the highest rating of distinguished rifleman. Post 175 was behind me all the way. I believe the men respected me. They knew they had a competitor on their hands and started to call me ‘Annie Oakley.’”

The Legion members were impressed enough with our skills that they gave us two M1 Garand rifles from the Civilian Marksmanship program and turned us loose on the military matches at Great Lakes Naval Training Station and Fort Sheridan. Doc Meissner spent many hours with us at the Fox Valley Rifle Range in Algonquin, Ill., and we made our debut at Fort Sheridan. We did not look impressive next to the crusty Camp Perry veterans with their jaunty campaign hats and ’03 Springfields slung over their shoulders.

During the match, they drifted down to see how we kids were doing. Spectators got a kick when Donna, the other girl on our team, fired the nine-shot rapid prone – all 4 feet 9 inches of her – and the repeated recoil of the big M1 pushed her back a foot and a half behind the firing line. Then they saw that the center of her target had been shot out at 200 yards. As the day went on, our names crept up the scoreboard. Doc couldn’t stop grinning.

I tried out again for the ROTC rifle team. I made it and went on to become co-captain, earning my Rifle Marksmanship letter in my senior year at the South Shore Letterman’s Award program. My dad came to the ceremony, and that was the first time he ever applauded me.

In that final year of high school, I was an ROTC company commander of 60 cadets, my grades had shot up, I had a steady girlfriend and was living large. My “expert” rating with the M1 Garand, plus an NRA instructor certificate, got me detached to help National Guard troops in a local logistical battalion earn their required marksmanship qualifications. I was also accepted to the bachelor’s program at the School of the Chicago Art Institute and the University of Chicago. Four years later, I graduated with honors in photography.

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pistol in my extended hand and appreciate their value. When everything in my world was crashing around me, The American Legion and the National Rifle Association punched my ticket. I wrote about that journey in my latest book, “American Shooter: A Personal History of Gun Culture in the United States.” Examining one’s life in the context of a history of deeply rooted traditions can be sobering, especially considering the state of today’s perception of the sport that gave me the life I’ve enjoyed.

Over the decades, I’ve taught young people how to shoot and passed on Doc Meissner’s lessons, which became part of my DNA. Boys from broken homes, young felons awaiting trial, kids tucking air rifles under their chins for the first time – I’ve tried to give back to the sport what it taught me. Respect for rules, the rewards of practice, sportsmanship, earning the esteem of peers and aspiring to a higher level of success are all part of the traditions of marksmanship and American character that trace back to the colonies at Jamestown.

Today, sadly, the howling, chest-beating and political maneuvering of a handful of ideologues has forced shooters from a feeling of pride in accomplishment to a qualifying defense of their sport. Extremists at both ends of the firearms debate use fear as their primary persuasion tool. Statistics are manipulated, word meanings are shaded, quotes are misinterpreted, and the field is claimed by whomever can woof and stomp the loudest. Sport shooters fear being labeled as “gun nuts,” communities fear rampages in the streets led by assault rifle-armed crazies, and citizens everywhere fear the usurping of their rights and liberties. The United States is a nation of mutts. We are conservative and progressive under the same roof. That lashup was recognized by the framers of the Constitution, and in their wisdom compromise won out over the inflexibility of ironclad ideology.

A gun is a tool like a hammer or a stick of dynamite. Where and how it is applied to a task

depends on the person using it. A sporting firearm is no less a recreational tool than a golf club, a tennis racket, a race car or a hot-air balloon – except it is less dangerous. Can we return marksmanship to its once traditional sports position as a spectator event? Can we embrace sporting firearms as part of a national shooting sports league? Can we spend some of the energy wasted on a deadlocked debate on disconnecting weapons required by the military and police from sporting and recreational venues? Can more ranges and facilities be built like the acres of golf courses that plaster the nation? Can more groups like the Legion and other membership organizations sponsor air rifle or .22 teams?

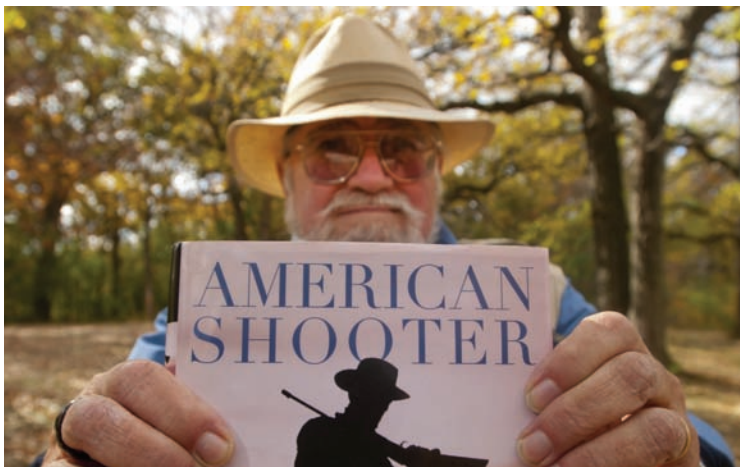
Today’s kids – and adults too – are under a lot of pressure: population, the economy, constant media alarms, expectations and ambitions. They all need,

at some time, to get their ticket punched to blossom, as I did. The tradition of marksmanship is as good a stress reliever as draining a 20-foot putt on the 18th green, a wicked backhand at the net, drifting through a corner at speed, or landing a big bass on light tackle. Consider the satisfactions of drilling a clutch

bull’s-eye at 100 meters, dusting a double on the trap range, pranging 10 steel discs in as many seconds, or notching the V in a black-powder shoot.

Young people must approach sporting firearms not with fear but with anticipation, a chance to participate in a traditional sport as old as modern civilization. It is a skill requiring discipline and character, and its rewards are great. Learning to handle a firearm with respect and consistency translates to other endeavors down the road. Looking back on a life that really began in an American Legion post’s basement with a rifle in my hands is a fine memory to pass along. 🌿

Gerry Souter has worked as an art teacher, security guard, rifle instructor and seaman in the Merchant Marine. He is the author of more than 50 books.



In his latest book, “American Shooter,” Souter combines a history of guns in the United States with a personal account of his experiences in recreational shooting at an American Legion post. Photo by Eldon Lindsay

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‘Because of the common cause’

USAA CEO Joe Robles shares the organization’s recipe for success during tough economic times and how its relationship with The American Legion helps. Since January 2011, USAA has been the Legion’s preferred provider of financial services.

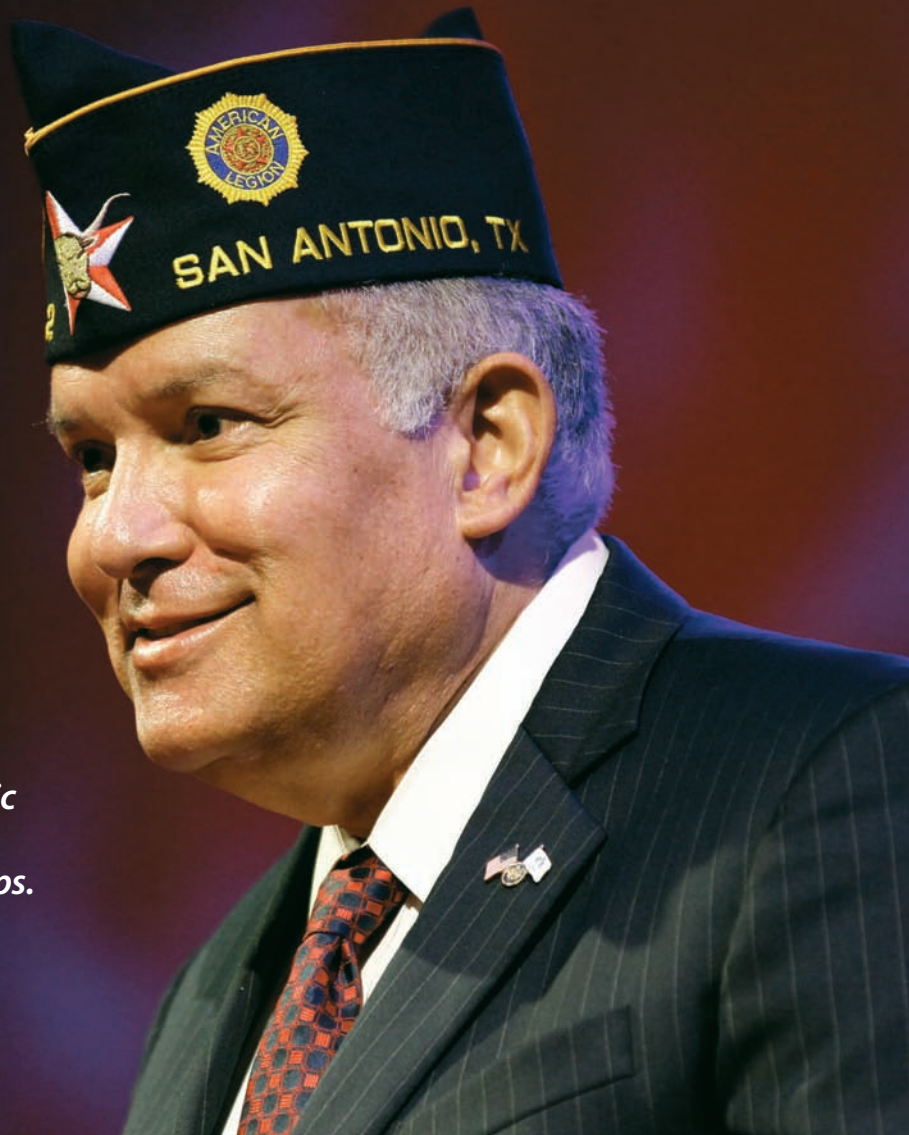


Photo by Tom Strattman

Retired U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Josue “Joe” Robles has spent nearly 20 years proving that tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive terms.

As president and CEO of 90-year-old USAA, The American Legion’s preferred provider of financial services, Robles has helped successfully steer the company through one of the most turbulent times in U.S. economic history. As other major banks and insurance providers have staggered through the global recession, USAA has increased its member base, pioneered technological breakthroughs, and positioned itself as a model for customer service in a 21st century society that has grown ever more comfortable doing personal business over the phone and online.

Since January 2011, when the formal relationship began, tens of thousands of American Legion members have called the special toll-free phone number at **1-877-699-2654**

or visited **www.usaa.com/legion** to purchase and receive USAA insurance and financial products and services.

As part of the relationship, USAA contributes to American Legion programs when Legion members or qualified dependents use the toll-free number or website to buy specific USAA products and services.

Robles, a decorated combat veteran and former commanding general of the U.S. Army’s 1st Infantry Division, says the preferred-provider relationship is off to a successful start because USAA and The American Legion share more than a business arrangement – they share common values, traditions, and confidence in a future guided by those who have worn the uniform and their families.

A Paid-Up-For-Life member of The American Legion, Robles recently spoke with *The American Legion Magazine*.

What were USAA's expectations heading into its relationship with The American Legion, and how well have they been fulfilled?

From my perspective, results have exceeded expectations. When we signed the deal with The American Legion, we were joining a group of veterans, and people who advocate for veterans, that was unsurpassed. Among all the 200-plus groups who the Department of Defense says constitute the affinity groups of the veterans market, the Legion is the gold standard when it comes to advocating for and caring about veterans.

Oh, and by the way, the Legion was organized about the same time as USAA. The Legion was established in 1919, and we started doing business in 1922. We've been in business since then, as has the Legion. We really appreciated an affinity that shared our advocacy and love for veterans' points of view. We have not deviated from our course, nor has the Legion.

Since USAA expanded eligibility beyond officers and former officers, and opened its doors to veterans who honorably served, how has USAA's philosophy been affected?

I believe we are better for it. The change illustrated that there were a whole lot of people out there who were every bit as important for us to serve way back when who we just didn't have the capacity to serve at the time. As a team, we made the decision to staff up and become an important force in the lives of veterans and their families. The first group we looked at was The American Legion. They look like us. They act like us. They share our same DNA. What a group to be aligned with!

So the big challenge was to build capacity to serve more members?

Yes. One of the things our members demanded of me, as CEO, was not to degrade our service or the quality of our products, or the competitiveness of our products. They didn't want us to bring in a whole bunch of people too fast and degrade our service or operating capabilities. I promised them that we would stay focused on quality, we would stay focused on member satisfaction, and as more veterans who had honorably served became members, we would maintain that same high level of excellence.

As Legionnaires are joining USAA in greater numbers, what are they looking for?

I honestly think they are looking to us for, and should be looking to us for, financial advice about their future. How to prepare for and live in retirement. That is probably one of the biggest needs

among many Americans today. We have a huge population of people like me – baby boomers – who are marching off to retirement at a pace of about 10,000 a day for the next 19 years. That's the current prognosis. So when you have 10,000 people a day going into retirement who probably haven't thought about or planned for retirement, and who most likely haven't sought professional advice, their savings may be inadequate. They may not know how to preserve their savings and live within their means. They may not know how to get the income-producing assets they will most likely need in retirement. Presently, they want cash because they have bills to pay and groceries to buy.

I think the one of the best things we offer today, along with our many competitively priced products and services, is the ability to speak with individuals, assess their needs and provide them an opportunity to plan a financial future with a professional adviser.

How important is it for Legionnaires to help their children join USAA?

Very. Once a member, always a member. Once you establish membership by purchasing a USAA auto or property insurance policy, your children become eligible for membership. This is especially important now, when we have a lot of World War II and Korean War veterans who served and are becoming members of USAA through our affinity program with The American Legion. Their children may want to become members, and some are becoming members. It is working out exactly the way we thought and hoped it would.

USAA's 2011 annual report was titled "Moments of Truth." Why was that, and can you say what the 2012 annual report's theme will be?

We used that title because we had our worst catastrophe-filled year in the history of USAA. We spent \$1.4 billion last year settling claims for our members. That is not a small and insignificant number. There were a lot of hailstorms. There were fires in the West and the Southwest. There were floods in the spring. There were tornadoes. We saw nearly everything. The only thing we didn't experience was a major hurricane.

Because 2011 was such an overwhelming year for our members, it was our moment of truth to be able to take care of them in one of their greatest

Watch the entire Joe Robles interview online:
 www.legion.org/magazine

moments of need. I like to say around our headquarters that when we have a catastrophe, a big fire, hailstorm or a hurricane, it's our Super Bowl. It's our Super Bowl because we get the chance to show our members how much we really care about them, and that we are going to do everything humanly possible to help them get back on track. We try to settle member claims as quickly as possible. In fact, I was giving a presentation to our board, and I showed them a video of a member family outside of Dallas-Fort Worth, where the house was leveled. Within 72 hours, USAA adjusters arrived on site, assessed the damage, wrote them a check and put it into their hands. Within six weeks, that family was moving into a brand-new house to start a new life and leaving behind the pile of rubble. That's a moment of truth. That's our moment of truth! In many cases, we can settle a claim as fast as any, and faster than most, of our competitors.

What I would call the "new normal" is also a moment of truth. The world we knew before the terrible downturn that the global economy is changing. So we've got to continually be preparing for the future and helping our members do the same. It's a different future than we thought it would be just a few years ago. To quote my favorite sports commentator, Yogi Berra, "The future ain't what it used to be."

We've got to think about the millennial generation. They have a different set of needs and wants than our generation does. They are all very technology literate. They like to do things on Facebook and Twitter. They also share our ambition and desire to do well. I know because I have one in my household.

USAA is planning for that generational and technological change, as well as whatever may happen from a global perspective.

How has USAA insulated itself from the troubles other banks and big insurance companies have experienced in recent years?

People ask me all the time, "What's the secret sauce for USAA? Why are you so successful when everybody else is struggling in many respects?"

It's a simple, three-part formula.

One part is the customer, or what we call members, who are honorable people who don't try to rip us off, who pay their bills on time and who, when they have a problem, are willing to admit they have a problem.

The second part is our approximately 23,500 employees, who are focused on USAA's mission,

which is to be the provider of choice for the military community and facilitate their financial security. To take care of those families. I never have to raise my voice. I just say to them, "We've got to help our members ... in everything we do." And our employees go off and take care of business.

And the third part is our incredible financial strength due to our efficiency and prudent financial management.

Are Legionnaires getting used to banking and doing insurance business over the phone and online?

Thirty-five years ago, people were saying, "You can't sell insurance over the phone. You can't do banking over the phone. You can't do investments over the phone."

And we said, "Oh yes we can." If we are smart enough to use simple and easy-to-understand technology and business processes, and we have the goodwill of our members, we will be very successful.

We have proven what happens when you treat your customers right, have the membership's interest at heart and tell them what to expect. And with this big technological boom, I think we have a gigantic head start. Some of our competitors are just now catching up, but we are pioneers.

For example, being able to deposit a check just by taking a picture of it on a smartphone and zipping it right into USAA Bank. People told me when I was a CFO, "That ain't gonna work. No one is ever going to do that." Well, we get deposits in the billions of dollars now on mobile. Not hundreds. Not thousands of dollars. Not even millions. Billions of dollars.

How do you see the relationship between USAA and The American Legion evolving?

Very positive. We are going to work really hard at continuing to build our relationship. We don't assume anything. We don't sign a contract and then just forget about it. Right now, about 50,000 members of The American Legion have joined USAA through the special toll free number (1-877-699-2654) and our Legion-dedicated website (www.usaa.com/legion). We have issued about 35,000 co-branded credit cards. We hope these numbers continue to grow. We are going to work hard, and we know The American Legion and its membership will continue to honor that hard work.

For us, this has been a wonderful relationship because of our common cause – veterans and their families – and because it makes good business sense for all. 🌿

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— from *"America For Me,"* Henry van Dyke, 1909



Henry van Dyke

Preacher, author and poet

Born in Germantown, Pa., in 1852, van Dyke was an outdoorsman, minister, writer, professor and diplomat. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1877 and, as pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, gained a reputation as one of the city's greatest preachers. He published several books and dozens of short stories, including "The Ruling Passion," "The Blue Flower" and "The Unknown Quantity." Van Dyke returned to Princeton as a professor of English literature in 1899 and became an American lecturer at the University of Paris in 1908. President Woodrow Wilson, a friend and former classmate, appointed him ambassador to the Netherlands and Luxembourg in 1913. Following that post, van Dyke became a chaplain in the Naval Reserve. He died in 1933.

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Our Legion Christmas



Photos courtesy Post 171

Storm King Post 171, Mineral, Wash.

Storm King Post 171 is known for its annual Christmas tree lighting, and last year's event was the most memorable yet. The day began with Auxiliary Unit 171 hosting a Secret Santa gift shop at the post for children and families to buy Christmas presents. Later, the post's members served up chili, Polish dogs, hot dogs and drinks for those who were hungry. Members of the Auxiliary sold baked goods for dessert.

The land surrounding the post hall was a winter wonderland. Jim Hale donated a tall tree from the Hale tree farm, and members put it up between the hall and Headquarters Tavern. The tree had bright and colorful new LED lights and was decorated with red robins and a few glass ornaments. At the base of the tree, a brightly lit Santa Claus train directed families to a spot where they could get photos taken with Santa. Lights also covered the American Legion hall, which had a tent and awning for people to stay dry and another for eating at picnic benches. For warmth, we stationed propane and kerosene heaters all around the property.

Steve and Debbie Downs kicked off the evening's festivities by leading the crowd in singing Christmas carols, and we showed a film of Sen. John McCain speaking about

[TROOP SUPPORT]

OCW reaches out to wounded warriors at Walter Reed

A group of American Legion staff members visited patients at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., on Oct. 5 as part of the organization's ongoing efforts to support U.S. troops and their families.

Lori Perkio, an assistant director for the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division, presented a Blue Star Banner to the parents of Army Spc. Matthew Commons, who stepped on an IED while on patrol in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on May 23. He suffered severe leg injuries, and his right foot is still at risk for amputation. American Legion Post 259 in Williamsport, Ind., provided the banner, coins and certificates of appreciation for Commons and his parents.

Meanwhile, the Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) program provided Amazon gift cards, water bottles and baseball caps to Commons and 40 other patients. That night, they attended a Legion-sponsored steak dinner.

Hosted by the Aleethia Foundation at the National Press Club, the dinner has been a weekly tradition in Washington since 2003, when Aleethia organized the Friday night gatherings as a way to help recently injured troops and their families enjoy an evening of social dining away from the hospital. The American Legion is one of several organizations that sponsor the event on a rotating basis.

National Commander Jim Koutz's main fundraising project is OCW, which supplements the high-quality care at U.S. military hospitals and transition units by providing exercise equipment, rehabilitation gear and other comfort items not supplied by the government. Koutz intends to raise \$500,000 for OCW during his year as commander.

Learn more about the program or make a donation:

 www.legion.org/ocw



his last Christmas of five as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He recalled how he had requested a Bible from the Viet Cong, and they gave him one to copy – but only for five minutes, so he just wrote down the Christmas verses. Following the video, Legionnaires put up a cross and placed a wreath on it representing all U.S. servicemembers who have been prisoners of war or remain missing.

Finally, Santa and a few of his elves arrived via Mineral fire truck. The children were so excited to see him. He greeted them before lighting the tree, then took pictures with children and their families, thanks to Jewel's Creations Photography.

During the Christmas event, Post 171 conducted a raffle for a turkey meal, a ham meal, a pizza-making kit, lots of Almond Roca toffee and a Budweiser stein. All the proceeds benefited veterans and their families. All in all, it was a great day here in Mineral.

– Kevin McMains, Post 171 adjutant



[VERBATIM]

“We tried ... to show them how dangerous and volatile and just unpredictable that whole environment was over there.”

Lt. Col. Andy Wood, former head of a Special Forces site security team in Libya, who claimed that the State Department ignored requests for enhanced security in the six months leading up to the Benghazi terrorist attack, removing as many as 34 people from the country

“I said, ‘Hey, you’re going to be taken home by the Marines today.’ And we made it to the finish line.”

Gunnery Sgt. Wilbur Anderson, who joined other Marines in helping bone cancer survivor Ben Baltz, 11, complete a triathlon after the boy's prosthetic leg broke. Pfc. Matt Morgan carried Baltz the rest of the way.

“The controversy (was) on a play that’s never happened in the history of the NFL. You can go back to the archives. You will not find that play.”

Lance Easley, replacement referee, who signaled a touchdown on the last play of the Seahawks-Packers game Sept. 24. The ruling was that the players caught the ball simultaneously, which means possession goes to the receiver. Fans and sports analysts disputed the ruling, which decided the game.

“One of the most glorious messes in the world is the mess created in the living room on Christmas Day. Don’t clean it up too quickly.”

Andy Rooney, longtime CBS News correspondent and World War II Army veteran (1919-2011)

Sources: CBS News, ABC News, NBC “TODAY” News



Lori Perkio of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division greets 82nd Airborne soldiers Lucas Oppelt, left, Jordan Folmar and Matthew Commons. Photo by Craig Roberts



Ted Roosevelt IV presents a portrait of his grandfather, Theodore Roosevelt Jr., to the National Executive Committee. Photo by Eldon Lindsay

[FALL MEETINGS]

Grandson of Roosevelt Jr. to lead anniversary committee

During the Fall Meetings, The American Legion's National Executive Committee passed a resolution naming Ted Roosevelt IV of New York, a Vietnam War Navy veteran, chairman of the organization's 100th Anniversary Observance Honorary Committee.

"I am honored and even more humbled by the opportunity to work with The American Legion to help it discharge the nation's obligations to its veterans," Roosevelt said. "The American Legion – what it has done, what it is doing and what it will continue to do – is exactly what my grandfather and his fellow co-founders intended to achieve."

Roosevelt will lead an honorary committee of distinguished Americans whose lives have been influenced by the Legion. Led by Past National Commanders Robert Spanogle and David Rehbein, the 100th Anniversary Observance Committee is developing plans to pay tribute to the Legion centennial, particularly at the post level, with major celebrations scheduled for the 2018 and 2019 national conventions, in Minneapolis and Indianapolis, respectively.

The NEC also passed Resolution 64, which charges the Legion's Internal Affairs Commission and Membership & Post Activities Committee with developing a five-year plan to reach a record 3.3 million members by 2019.

"We've passed a lot of important resolutions during these meetings, but none of them will matter if we aren't around to implement them," National Commander Jim Koutz said. "If we don't keep advancing membership, who will be there to keep veterans from falling through the cracks?"

Charles Schmidt, National Executive Committeeman for Oregon, said that the Legion's membership is a measuring stick of its influence.

"It's our voice on Capitol Hill, and we need a strong voice with all the issues that our veterans are going through," he said. "We cannot afford for that voice to become a soft whisper."

Operation Comfort Warriors, Koutz's main fundraising project, received nearly \$60,000 in generous contributions from posts, departments and other military-friendly organizations during the meetings.

KEY RESOLUTIONS OF THE NEC'S 2012 FALL MEETINGS

AMERICANISM

- 14** Extend contract for Shelby, N.C., to host Legion Baseball World Series through 2019
- 16** Mandatory background check screenings for coaches, managers and volunteer staff of American Legion Baseball teams

ECONOMIC

- 22** Support legislation that preserves quick delivery of VA claims and protects veteran employees of the U.S. Postal Service

FINANCE

- 1** Appoint Ted Roosevelt IV chairman of The American Legion's 100th Anniversary Observance Honorary Committee

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

- 64** Develop a five-year strategic plan for growing membership

NATIONAL SECURITY

- 55** Use all resources at the Legion's disposal to prevent sequestration defense cuts
- 55** Urge government to reopen National Guard Patriot Academy at Muscatatuck Urban Training Center in Butlerville, Ind.

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION

- 39** Urge VA to develop a national strategic plan to meet the needs of female veterans

The full text of all resolutions passed at the Fall Meetings is available online:

 archive.legion.org, click on "Resolutions"

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I Love You to the Moon and Back

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Photo courtesy Post 2

Edward B. Rhodes/Parkland Post 2, Tacoma, Wash.

In 2011, Edward B. Rhodes Post 2 assisted in organizing four Christmas parties for the families of more than 500 soldiers of 4th Brigade, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. We started sponsoring "Chaos" Company of the 1/38 in August 2009. In October 2010, we adopted the entire 1/38. At the first year's Christmas party, we gave age-appropriate gifts to the soldiers' children. At the past two years' parties, every child received a Build-A-Bear from Santa. We also supplied snacks or meals, whichever was requested.

— Keith Foley, Post 2 adjutant

[WAR ON TERROR]

Taliban, Iran partners in crime

The Afghan Taliban have opened an office in Iran and engaged in talks with Tehran to secure surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), *The Wall Street Journal* reports. Although the Taliban (composed of Sunni Muslims) and Iran (governed by Shiite Muslims) were at odds during the period of Taliban rule in the 1990s until the U.S. invasion in 2001, the two sides now see the United States as a common enemy.

Iran is known to have sent lethal support and to have provided training to the Taliban in recent years, but has held off from supplying "signature weapons" like SAMs and the sort of mines used by Iranian-backed insurgents against U.S. forces in Iraq.

[WAR ON TERROR]

Militants target Pakistan's nukes

For the third time in as many years, militants have attacked a facility linked to control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. The most recent attack came in late August, when militants struck an air base west of Islamabad housing "some of Pakistan's most advanced weapons systems, possibly including nuclear warheads," Radio Free Europe reports.

The attack was repulsed by security forces, as were earlier attacks. The first came in 2009, when militants attacked the headquarters of the Pakistani military. The second came in 2011, when militants targeted a key naval facility in Karachi.

Although the United States has given Islamabad nearly \$100 million since 9/11 expressly for shoring up security at the country's nuclear bases, a retired Pakistani general concedes that "these places are vulnerable and Pakistan will have to do a lot more."



VEER

[FOREIGN AFFAIRS]

Agent Orange cleanup

The United States and Vietnam have begun a joint effort to clean up Agent Orange residue at Da Nang International Airport.

"The U.S. military sprayed up to 12 million gallons of the defoliant onto Vietnam's jungles over a 10-year period during the Vietnam War," according to Reuters. Now the United States is providing \$41 million to reduce contamination levels in 73,000 cubic meters of soil. "The contaminated soil and sediment will be excavated and heated in a pile structure to a high temperature to destroy the chemical."

Vietnam is building a power station to support the project.

[ENERGY]

A new oil power

The main topic of conversation at a recent OPEC conference in Vienna was the re-emergence of the United States as a global oil power. As *Financial Times* reports, "Over the past three years, the United States has accounted for the entire net increase in global oil output, excluding OPEC members and former Soviet republics." In fact, the United States increased oil and liquid hydrocarbon output by 1.1 million barrels per day between 2008 and 2011.

As the United States expands development of shale oil, output will only grow. Ryan Lance, CEO of ConocoPhillips, says his firm expects U.S. shale-liquids production to grow by 150 percent by 2020. "Thanks to both shale and the Canadian oil sands, North America could become self-sufficient in oil ... by 2025 and even a net exporter."



VEER

[FOREIGN AFFAIRS]

New recruits

Israel recently welcomed 127 soldiers-to-be from around the world during ceremonies at Ben-Gurion International Airport outside Tel Aviv. These "lone soldiers" leave their native countries to become Israeli citizens and defend the Jewish state.

As *The New York Times* reports, "Israel has enlisted 8,217 men and women from other countries since 2009, 1,661 of them from the United States, second only to Russia's 1,685."

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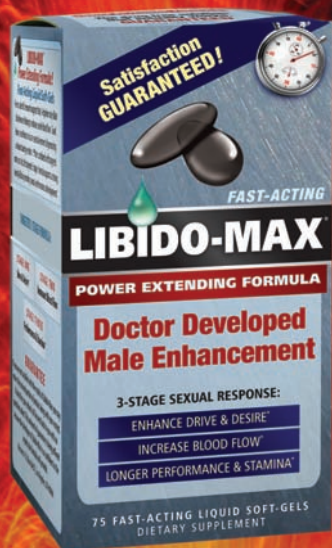
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RAPID FIRE

Rutledge-Boviall-Schauf-Madison Post 95, Delavan, Wis.

In 2011, Post 95 hosted its 50th annual Christmas Day dinner for the community. In 1961, a member suggested that the post do something for those who were less fortunate, as well as individuals and families who did not want to be alone during the holidays, and the dinner quickly became a community tradition. We put on a complete turkey dinner with all the trimmings. We do carryouts for shut-ins and provide rides to the post home. Members of the Auxiliary help by baking pies, making Jell-O, decorating and serving meals. Because of the ages of some of the veterans, we get outside help from families in the community. Turkeys have been donated for the past six or seven years, and a nearby resort or assisted living facility usually helps prepare meals and bring them back to the post for serving. During the time that we're open on Christmas Day, we try to provide entertainment and singalongs if we're able, as well as a visit from Santa Claus for the children and those who are young at heart.



Photo by Terry Mayer/Walworth County Sunday

— Larry Malsch, Post 95 commander

[EDUCATION]

GI Bill transfers and VRAP



Q: I retired from the Air Force and need clarification on the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP). I transferred my Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to my children. I am currently unemployed and would like to go back to school for an audio production degree. Should I apply for VRAP to update my skills?

A: The answer depends on how much Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement you transferred. You may be eligible for VRAP if you transferred all of your unused benefits to a spouse or dependent child. Remember, to qualify for VRAP you cannot

be eligible for an education program administered by VA. Apply for the VRAP at the GI Bill website, and VA will send you a letter advising you if you qualify for the program.

Valerie Heffner, a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Arizona, is a past vice president of the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators. askvalerie@legion.org

[ENTERTAINMENT]

Legionnaire rolls out game app

Dale Russell of Post 117 in Billings, Mont., has turned his 25-year-old board game, Domino Roll-Out, into a smartphone app. In the game, players have 12 dominoes, and each roll of the dice takes away dominoes equal in numerical value to that roll. The goal is to earn "winnings" by placing bets on which dots a player thinks will be left at the end.

"My primary objective with the money I make is to help other veterans, be it individuals or organizations helping veterans," Russell says. "I tell people, 'I'm not claiming I have the next Nintendo. But who is to say I don't?'"

Domino Roll-Out is available for \$1.99 at the Apple App Store for use with an iPhone or iPad, and at Google Play for Android users.

www.dominorollout.com



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National Commander Jim Koutz testifies before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees on Oct. 3. Photo by Craig Roberts

[LEGISLATIVE]

Commander lays out Legion's legislative priorities

The VA claims backlog, sequestration and credentialing are The American Legion's top three legislative priorities, National Commander Jim Koutz told Congress on Oct. 3.

Testifying before a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees, Koutz was asked what he would do to reduce the claims backlog.

"The only way you're going to get that backlog taken care of is to hire more people," Koutz said. "And they've got to do the claims more accurately. When a claim comes back (from VA), the first thing we see is mistakes, and then it goes back to the regional office and we're starting all over again. (VA Secretary) Eric Shinseki said he'd like to see a 98 percent accuracy. If we get to that number, I think you'll see the backlog of claims reduced."

Koutz added that more VA clinics and staff are needed in rural areas. "Veterans are driving up to four hours, and when they get there, they probably can't get in," he said. "The problem is we don't have enough staff, doctors, medical equipment. If we add staff (and) add more clinics, I think that'd help these veterans."

The commander also called on Congress to see that national security and veterans programs are not sacrificed in Washington's budget battle. Previous legislation has included language that specifically protects VA programs from cuts. As the budget deficit widens, similar protections are necessary today, he said.

Meanwhile, the Legion will keep pushing the overhaul of licensure and certification policies as they relate to military job skills, at both the national and state levels. By working with credentialing and licensing agencies, the Legion hopes to help veterans receive credit for military training, maximize their abilities and move quickly into productive careers.

During a Q&A session, committee members praised the Legion for its filing of 244,000 VA benefits claims, at no charge to veterans, and a 76.6 percent success rate in getting incorrect VA disability ratings overturned. The Legion has also done "cutting-edge" work in the credentialing and licensing arena, and the development of a Claims Coach app to simplify the benefits process for veterans.



Photo courtesy Post 35

Bowen-Holliday Post 35, Traverse City, Mich.

Last December, Post 35 hosted its second annual Legion Christmas Reunion with members of Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 609 as honored guests. More than 100 people attended to honor these special veterans. The highlight was seeing the guests shake each and every Purple Heart veteran's hand and thank him for his service and sacrifices. Our Legion Christmas Reunion event is known throughout Michigan's Ninth District as one of the best happening, and we are honored to serve and recognize these patriots. This year's Legion Christmas Reunion will honor Korean War veterans.

— Becky Lawrence, Auxiliary Unit 35 member and Post 35 event planner



Photo courtesy Josh Daniels

Post 350, Needville, Texas

Our Christmas party in December 2011 became a homecoming party honoring Sgt. 1st Class Charles Armstead, who lost a leg in Iraq. His family came and was so thankful that we did this for him. Several of Charles' high school football teammates came too, and his coach, Monte Pritchett, presented him with a Needville Blue Jays helmet from his playing days, saying kind words about him being a fighter both on the football field and in recovery. Our congressman, Pete Olson, presented Charles with a certificate of appreciation and invited him to a 5K benefit for wounded warriors over in Sugar Land. We had barbecue chicken, and Charles' graduating class presented him with some gift cards to help finish out his home, which was built by a nonprofit organization. We inducted Charles into the post, and gave him an award and his membership card.

— Bradley Stavinoha, Post 350 adjutant



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[HISTORY]

HOMETOWN HERO

Pearl Harbor survivor Frank Curre died on the attack's 70th anniversary.

BY DON BRADLEY

The anniversary of the Dec. 7, 1941, attack at Pearl Harbor is an opportunity for Americans to remember those who have served their country in the military, especially World War II veterans. The numbers of those who served in what they simply called “the war” are dwindling as old age now takes the generation that triumphed over the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy.

One of these veterans was Frank Curre of Waco, Texas, who lived a life filled with ironies that began when the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor.

Curre joined the Navy in June 1941 because he couldn’t find work. The 17-year-old had to threaten to “bribe a hobo” to forge his mother’s name to get her to sign off on his enlistment. On Dec. 7, 18-year-old Curre was a cook on the battleship *Tennessee* at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked, killing nearly 2,400 Americans.

After the war, Curre became a popular visitor at Tennyson Middle School in Waco, where he captivated seventh- and eighth-graders with the tale of his “lucky break” at Pearl Harbor, when a bomb exploded near him on *Tennessee*’s deck and blew him, unharmed, into the water. He watched as another bomb, moments later, landed on the exact spot where he’d been standing.

Curre later served on the Navy escort carrier *Petrof Bay*, which saw action in the Leyte Gulf and at Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. He did not know until after the war that *Petrof Bay* helped provide support for his brother, Edwin, as he went ashore with the third wave of Marines to secure Okinawa in June 1945. Neither knew the other was there until they had a conversation about the battle years later back in Waco.



After the war, Curre returned to Waco, married and worked as a newspaper pressman for 60 years. He was a respected spokesman for veterans and volunteered for nearly 35 years at the VA hospital in Temple, Texas. Curre also was an active member of American Legion Post 121 in Waco and his beloved Pearl Harbor survivors group.

The national Pearl Harbor Survivors Association officially disbanded due to dwindling membership on Dec. 31, 2011, but its spirit lingers in the Lone Star State. Six members of the Central Texas chapter are still living.

Curre died at 88 on Dec. 7, 2011 – the 70th anniversary of the attack. He suffered from mesothelioma caused by his naval service; his disability for it had been approved just the day before. He wasn’t able to accompany the Central Texas chapter on its last visit to Hawaii, but word was passed to the tour bus at Pearl Harbor, where passengers observed a moment of silence in his honor.

The students at Tennyson Middle School won’t forget Curre, either. When they turned an empty classroom into a hall of honor for those who fought in World War II, they named it after him.

In one of Curre’s last outings, he served as grand marshal of Waco’s Veterans Day parade in 2011. Asked by a reporter what it’s like to be a hero, he replied, “I’m not a hero. They’re the ones who never made it home.”

Don Bradley is an Air Force veteran and retired broadcasting professional. He lives in Waco, Texas.

[AWARDS]

Winners of post, department history contests announced

During the National Executive Committee’s Fall Meetings in Indianapolis, dozens of Legion historians met to judge the National Post History and National Department History contests. Newly appointed National Historian N. Larry Rozier of North Carolina announced the winners during his report to the NEC. Out of 47 total entries – up from 42 last year – the top finishers in each category are:

One-Year Department Yearbook – First Award, Department of Ohio; Second Award, Department of North Carolina; Third Award, Department of Georgia

One-Year Department Narrative – First Award, Department of North Carolina; Second Award, Department of Maine

One-Year Post Yearbook – First Award, Adams Township Post 553, Toledo, Ohio; Second Award, Charles S. Hatch Post 79, Berwick, Maine; Third Award, Alois Dreikosen Post 469, Marathon, Wis.

One-Year Post Narrative – First Award, Marshall S. Sayner Post 341, Bella Vista, Ark.; Second Award, Pony Express Post 359, St. Joseph, Mo.; Third Award, Frank E. Booma Post 6, Portsmouth, N.H.

Post and department historians should start now on next year’s entries. Learn more about the National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion online:

 www.nadhal.org

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[PERSONAL FINANCE]

Don't let holiday spirit undo your budget

FOCUS ON FINANCES

WITH JUNE WALBERT
& J.J. MONTANARO

We've both served in the Army, and we've both worked in results-oriented sales jobs. So we understand that execution is everything. Visions, plans and preparations are important, but without proper follow-through they quickly become pointless. With that in mind, we've got four tips to help you execute your gift-buying plan with precision this year.

■ **Budget is the bottom line.** Determine how much you can afford to spend for gifts before you shop. Ideally, it's money you've already set aside, but regardless, shop within your means.

■ **Make a shopping list.** One of the easiest ways to get off track is to get caught up in the holiday spirit. Music, sales and a generally festive atmosphere can cause even the best plans to come unglued. Let your shopping list be your guide and guardrails. On sale or not, if an item is not on your list, it's a no-go. If you build a list that falls within your budget and stick to it, the beginning of the new year can be as enjoyable as the end of the old one.

■ **Go cash only.** Tote the vault. We love the convenience

and rewards that credit cards offer, but when it comes to holiday shopping you may want to leave home without them. They offer the greatest opportunity to spend what you don't have or didn't plan on spending. Stick to cash, and when it's gone, you're done.

■ **Creativity is a good thing.** Put thought over money. Make no mistake: there are no gifts being crafted at our houses. But maybe that's something you do. The idea is to create some gifts that don't cost a lot, but show that you care. These could be baked goods, coupons for services (babysitting, lawn mowing), or even cool photos that capture an important moment or friendship. Remember, the goal is to finish the holidays with no more debt than you had when you started.

Incorporate these techniques and you'll be smiling all the way through the holidays and right into the new year – without a big chunk of new debt.

June Lantz Walbert and J.J. Montanaro are certified financial planners for USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for them online.


www.legion.org/focusonfinances

2013 AMERICAN LEGION CALENDAR

EVENT DATE	EVENT	EVENT CITY	AVAILABLE AIRPORT(S)
Jan. 11-12	Membership Planning Meeting	Indianapolis	IND
Feb. 22-27	Department Service Officer School/Washington Conference	Washington	DCA, BWI, IAD
April 19-21	Oratorical Scholarship Finals	Indianapolis	IND
May 3-9	NEC Spring Meetings	Indianapolis	IND
July 17-27	Boys Nation	Washington	DCA
Aug. 2-4	Department Service Officer School/Membership Workshop	Indianapolis	IND
Aug. 5-11	Junior Shooting Sports 3-Position Air Rifle National Championship	Colorado Springs, Colo.	COS
Aug. 8-12	American Legion Baseball Regionals	Various locations	BDL, LIT, IND, FAR, EUG, PHX, PHL, GSO, CLT
Aug. 15-22	Legion Baseball World Series	Shelby, N.C.	CLT, GSP
Aug. 19-30	95th National Convention	Houston	IAH, HOU
Sept. 20-22	Children & Youth Conference	Indianapolis	IND
Sept. 27-29	Americanism Conference	Indianapolis	IND
Oct. 11-17	NEC Fall Meetings	Indianapolis	IND
Oct. 26-Nov. 1	Legion College	Indianapolis	IND

[MEETINGS]

Discount airfare offered for 2013 Legion meetings

The American Legion has obtained discounts with American Airlines, Delta Airlines and United Airlines for the organization's 2013 meetings.

Those who want National Headquarters to obtain their airline tickets can contact Marti Wooden at (317) 630-1232 or at mwooden@legion.org. Otherwise, Legionnaires can go through the airlines directly to obtain discounts. Tickets should be purchased at least 30 days prior to travel. Discounts vary depending on hub cities, advance ticketing and booking class of service for the reservations. Airlines typically charge a \$25 service fee to make reservations.

No discounts apply with Amtrak or Greyhound, but reservations can be made online at www.amtrak.com and www.greyhound.com, or by phone at 1-800-231-2222 for Greyhound.

AIRLINE CONTACTS

American Airlines	1-800-433-1790 – Reference Index No. 22408
Delta Airlines	1-800-328-1111 – Refer to File No. NMEX4
United Airlines	1-800-521-4041 – Reference Agreement Code No. 721185 and code ZNSN

"For 40-Years, I was tortured with unbearable indigestion"

Confessions of an acid reflux victim

"And How I BEAT the indigestion Nightmare that Almost Killed Me!"

By Ralph Burns;
"Former" acid reflux sufferer

Here's My Story:

I've Suffered With Acid Reflux for Almost 40 Years Now. Unless you experience it; you can't imagine how horrible it is. Every time I ate spicy foods I would get what I called "ROT GUT". Like something was rotting in my stomach. But now I can eat anything... No matter how spicy. Even if I never could before.

Let me explain...

For the better part of my life; I purposely avoided a lot of foods. Especially ones with even a tiny bit of seasoning. Because if I didn't, I'd experience a burning sensation through my esophagus— like somebody poured hot lead or battery acid down my throat. Add to that, those disgusting "mini-throw ups" and I was in "indigestion hell".

"I was beside myself. What was I gonna do? Keep taking the pills, or suffer with problems that could ultimately be my demise."

Doctors put me on all sorts of antacid remedies. But nothing worked. Or if they did, it would only be for a brief period. And then boom! My nightmare would return.

Sometimes, I felt like I was dying. The pain was unbearable and nothing could make it stop.

But then my wife, who occasionally suffered with the same problem; gave me one of her prescription acid blockers. It was a miracle. I felt like I could live again. Because before that, I was just miserable. I wanted to kill myself. But thankfully, it worked, and worked well.

I felt great, until about one year ago; when I read an FDA warning that scared the heck out of me. It went something like this...

FDA WARNING! Using proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) on a long term basis, increases your risk of hip, bone and spinal fractures.

That's a particular concern to me, since many acid blockers are PPI's. I've gone through two back surgeries and bilateral hip replacements. I had to ask myself, could PPI's have been responsible for my medical woes? After all...

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I was "between a rock and a hard place". Stop using the PPI's and I'm a "dead man in the water". It would be unbearable. I wouldn't be able to eat anything. I'd have to go on a water diet.

But that FDA warning was scary. I knew I had to stop or else risk developing spinal stenosis. My mother had that. And I watched her die a horrible death. Her spine just fractured. It was the worst death. She didn't deserve that. And neither do I.

I had to quit. So I stopped taking PPI's for a day or so. But my indigestion was worse than ever. I would rather take the chance of a spinal fracture than to live like that again. I tried everything. Even started using home remedies like Apple cider vinegar. But it just felt like I was pouring even more acid down my throat.

Then one day at dinner, a friend of mine said "why don't you try an aloe drink?" I said "aloe drink"? Jeez. That doesn't sound good at all! The next day he brought me a case of something called *AloeCure*®. I was skeptical, but I was desperate! So instead of being an ingrate I decided to try it.

I was shocked! *AloeCure*® tasted pretty good too. It has a pleasant grape



63-year old Ralph Burns enjoying a spicy hot portion of Lobster Fra Diavolo. Just 15 minutes after taking *AloeCure*®

flavor that I actually enjoy drinking. I decided to experiment. I stopped taking the PPI's altogether and replaced it with a daily diet of *AloeCure*®. Then something remarkable happened... NOTHING! Not even the slightest hint of indigestion.

And here's the best part. The next day we had Italian food — my worst enemy. But for the first time in 40 years I didn't get indigestion without relying on prescription or OTC pills and tablets. Finally, I just didn't need them anymore!

I was so thrilled; I wrote the *AloeCure*® company to tell them how amazing their product is. They thanked me, and asked me to tell my story... The story that changed my life. I said "Sure, but only if you send me a hefty supply of *AloeCure*®. I just can't live without it."

But don't believe me. You have to try this stuff for yourself. I recommend *AloeCure*® to anyone who suffers with the same problem I did. It gives you immediate relief. You'll be grateful you did. I sure am. It's the best thing that's happened to me in a long, long time.

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How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion notices for veterans. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280, e-mail reunions@legion.org or submit information via our website, www.legion.org/reunions.

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are publicized free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. **Due to the large number of reunions, The American Legion Magazine will publish a group's listing only once a year.**

Notices should be sent at least six months prior to the reunion to ensure timely publication.

Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. **We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim.** Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280 or e-mail reunions@legion.org.

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life

memberships by their posts. **This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership.** Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.**

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.** Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

55th & 58th Weather Recon Sqdns, Branson, MO, 6/5-8, Conrad Layton, (918) 446-5945, conradlay@aol.com; **100th Bomb Wing 8th AF**, San Diego, 4/28-5/2, David Lambert, (949) 786-1914, 3lambert@cox.net; **1374th M&C Sqdn (1954-1955)**, Lady Lake, FL, 2/9-10, Frederick Miller, (352) 753-3622, pamfem@embarqmail.com; **Super Sabre Society**, Las Vegas, 4/9-12, Dewey Clawson, (724) 336-4273, deweyclawson@hotmail.com

ARMY

2nd Inf Rgt, Pigeon Forge, TN, 5/16-19, Israel Tames, (210) 239-6404, tames25@sbcglobal.net;

3/5 Cav Black Knights, Colorado Springs, CO, 6/20-24, Mike Cook, (502) 969-9202, mwtjcook@insightbb.com; **6th & 7th Bns 15th Arty**, Colorado Springs, CO, 5/16-19, Ray Tingstrom, (808) 271-1521, ertingstrom@yahoo.com; **458th Trans Co - PBRs, LARCs, DUKWs (1943-1977)**, Portland, OR, 6/5-8, Jim Winstead, (417) 894-2805, pbrmp@sbcglobal.net; **854th Trans Co (Qui Nhon, Vietnam, 1966-1968)**, Fort Myers, FL, 3/16, Tom Taylor, (734) 454-0347, redtom100@aol.com; **A Co 1st/501st Rgt 101st Abn Div (Vietnam, 1967-1972)**, Branson, MO, 6/5-8, Barry Gregorich, (724) 238-9317, barrygregorich@yahoo.com; **Aerial Rocket Assn (ARA)**, Hershey, PA, 6/5-9, Asa Talbot, (540) 298-7546, asatalbot@juno.com

COAST GUARD

Androscoggin WHEC 68, St. Petersburg, FL, 5/5-9, David White, (727) 204-4638, drwhite196@aol.com

MARINES

1st Bn 1st Mar Rgt (Vietnam), New Orleans, 7/13-16, Will Lomen, (206) 323-6461, wlomen@hotmail.com; **I Co 3rd Bn 7th Mar 1st Mar Div**, Myrtle Beach, SC, 4/24-27, Dennis Deibert, (717) 652-1695; **Ontonos Crew**, Quantico, VA, 5/8-11, Louis Najfus, (678) 546-1444, najfus@hotmail.com; **Simon Lake AS 33**, Ocala, FL, 6/20-30, Charles Perry, (352) 875-5495, pop2000_34482@yahoo.com

NAVY

Chikaskia AO 54, Jacksonville, FL, 4/24-28, Robert Grant, (352) 753-7552, bobgrant1942@gmail.com; **Conyngham DD 371/DDG 17**, New Orleans, 5/19-23, David Suckow, (651) 681-1927, dsuckow@comcast.net; **Dahlgren DLG 12/DDG 43**, Erie, PA, 6/17-23, Joseph Coventree, (610) 659-8824, dlg12jc@yahoo.com; **Donner LSD 20**, Providence, RI, 5/2-5, Dennis Heimbach, (610) 775-7539, dheimb@1usa.com; **Harry E. Hubbard DD 748**, Virginia Beach, VA, 5/15-19, Richard Oliver, (727) 363-3059, dd748@mac.com; **Hoel DDG 13**, Everett, WA, 8/9-12, John Peverly, (425) 335-4066, jpeverly@comcast.net; **Ingraham DD 694**, Indianapolis, 5/1-4, Gregg Miller, (814) 695-3246, gmmflyer@verizon.net; **Jenkins DD 447**, Washington, 5/15-19, Bob "Ski" Roginsky, (440) 582-5856, bjski1@aol.com; **Lapon SS 260/SSN 661**, Tucson, AZ, 6/20-23, Raymond Zieverink, (803) 324-1414, lapon.reunion@yahoo.com

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Recently, I found myself struggling to "perform." I began losing my confidence and with it, my sense of "male prowess". I was feeling a great deal of pressure and embarrassment, my wife was beginning to think it was something she did or didn't do – it wasn't.

I wasn't comfortable discussing my situation with anyone – not even my doctor – so in a desperate attempt to find some help, I privately did some research on the web.

First, I found that many **HEALTHY** men experience a decrease in virility with age. I wasn't alone! **Good blood circulation** is the key to maintaining virility, and there are a number of factors that can weaken it.

Armed with this new information, I began to search through the many "male enhancement" products on the net. I found a pill and patch for everything and anything, but one product stood out among them - **Maxoderm** is completely different – not a pill or a patch, this surprisingly effective **topical formula** is delivered directly to the "source" – where I needed it most. Best of all, **Maxoderm** is recommended by **Leading Physician, Michael A. Savino, M.D., F.A.C.S.**, and you **don't** need a prescription. I don't need to swallow a pill, prescription or not, or wear some kind of patch on my shoulder!

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Walker AFB Baseball Team (1958), Billy Levens, (352) 556-7261, levensb2@att.net

TAPS

Juan H. Cintron, Dept. of Puerto Rico. Nat'l Vice Cmdr. 1993-1994, Dept. Cmdr. 1950-1951, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Cmte. Memb. 1953-1954, Nat'l Veterans Preference Cmte. Memb. 1954-1955, Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Memb. 1955-1956 and 1978-1981, Nat'l Counter-Subversive Activ. Cmte. Memb. 1956-1957, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cmsn. Vice Chmn. 1956-1962, Nat'l Inter-American Cmte. Memb. 1962-1963, Nat'l Naval Affairs Cmte. Memb. 1964-1967, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Alt. Memb. 1965-1967, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Memb. 1967-1968 and 1987-1991, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 1967-1968, 1987-1988 and

1989-1991, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1976-1977, 1978-1988 and 1994-1995, Nat'l Public Relations Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 1988-1989, and Nat'l Foreign Relations Cmsn. Nat'l Cmdr.'s Rep. 1991-1993 and 1995-1998.

Francis W. Ethun Sr., Dept. of Texas. Nat'l & Homeland Sec. Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1989-1990, Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 1990-1992 and Nat'l Foreign Relations Cmsn. Memb. 1992-2012.

Michael H. Hogan, Dept. of Iowa. Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Region 6 Memb. 1999-2003 and 2005-2012, Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Region 6 Vice Chmn. 2003-2004 and Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Region 6 Chmn. 2004-2005.

John A. Jarosinski, Dept. of Maryland. Nat'l Naval Affairs Cmte. Consultant 1992-2012.

Lois M. Rand, Dept. of Wisconsin. Nat'l Child Welfare Cmsn. Region 5 Memb. 1959-1963, 1965-1966 and 1968-1970, Nat'l Child Welfare Cmsn. Region 5 Vice Chmn. 1963-1964 and 1966-1967, Nat'l Child Welfare Cmsn. Region 5 Chmn. 1964-1965 and 1967-1968, Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Region 5 Memb. 1970-1972, 1974-1975 and 1977-1980, Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Region 5 Vice Chmn. 1972-1973 and 1975-1976, and Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Region 5 Chmn. 1973-1974 and 1976-1977.

Ernest N. Schmit, Dept. of North Carolina. Nat'l Adj. 1967, Dept. Cmdr. 1957-1958, Nat'l & Homeland Sec. Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1965-1966, Nat'l Cmdr.'s Aide 1966-1967, Nat'l Sec. Cmsn. Memb. 1966-1972, Nat'l Finance Cmsn. Ex-Officio Sec. 1967, Nat'l Overseas Graves Decoration Trust Sec. 1967, 50th Anniversary Cmte. Ex-Officio Memb. 1967, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Memb. 1972-1980, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Chmn. 1972-1980, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Chmn. 1980-1981, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cmsn. Consultant 1981-1984, Nat'l Conv. Cmsn. Memb. 1984-2006 and Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 2006-2007.

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b. Paid and/or requested circulation		
1. Paid/Requested outside-county subscriptions stated on Form 3541	2,288,898	2,291,774
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1. Outside-county as stated on Form 3541	3,449	5,387
2. In-county as stated on Form 3541	0	0
3. Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
e. Free distribution outside the mail	0	0
f. Total Free distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e)	3,449	5,387
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Jeffrey Stoffer, Publisher

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. An onion a day keeps everyone away.

I ASKED MY SHRINK to show me one positive result from all my visits. He showed me his new Porsche.

A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER asked one of her students what he planned to give his younger brother for Christmas.

"I don't know," the little boy replied. "I gave him chicken pox last year."

A BOY TOLD HIS FATHER that he wanted to drive Army tanks when he grew up.

"Well, son," his father replied, "if that's what you want to do, I won't stand in your way."

AN UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER said to an applicant, "I see you've found temporary work."

"That's right," the applicant beamed. "I'm a substitute Santa at a department store."

"What's your job title?"

"Subordinate Claus."

ONE VEGETARIAN said to another, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horseradish."

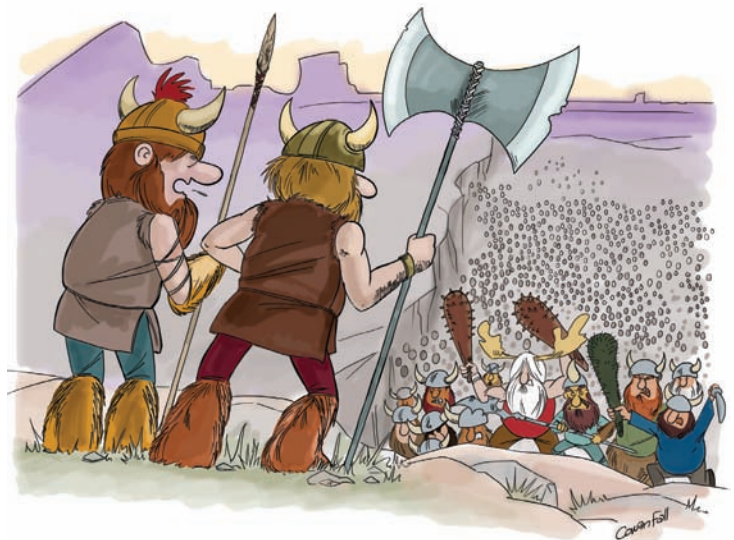
A WIFE ENTERED the study to find her husband talking to their family lawyer and examining some papers on a table.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Making a wish," her husband replied meekly.

"A wish?"

"Yes, dear. In your presence, I won't presume to call it a will."



"Good news, General. Only the first row is real. The rest are computer generated."



"Sir, we all chipped in and got you a monthlong trip abroad for Christmas."

A GROUP OF PREGNANT WOMEN and their husbands attended a prenatal class. The instructor emphasized the importance of staying healthy during pregnancy.

"Ladies, exercise is good for you," she said.

"Walking is quite beneficial. And gentlemen, it wouldn't kill you to walk with her."

One man piped up, "Is it OK if she carries a golf bag while she's walking?"

ONE CHILD on the playground said to another, "My father is very important. He's a Lion, a Moose and an Elk."

"Gee," the other child replied, "how much does it cost to see him?"

"ARE YOU HAPPY the NFL strike is over? Those NFL replacement refs were so bad they thought the Green Bay Packers were a Wisconsin moving company." – Jay Leno



"I'm feeling Claus-trophobic!"



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